TRAITOR UNKNOWN

By M. V. HEBERDEN

25¢

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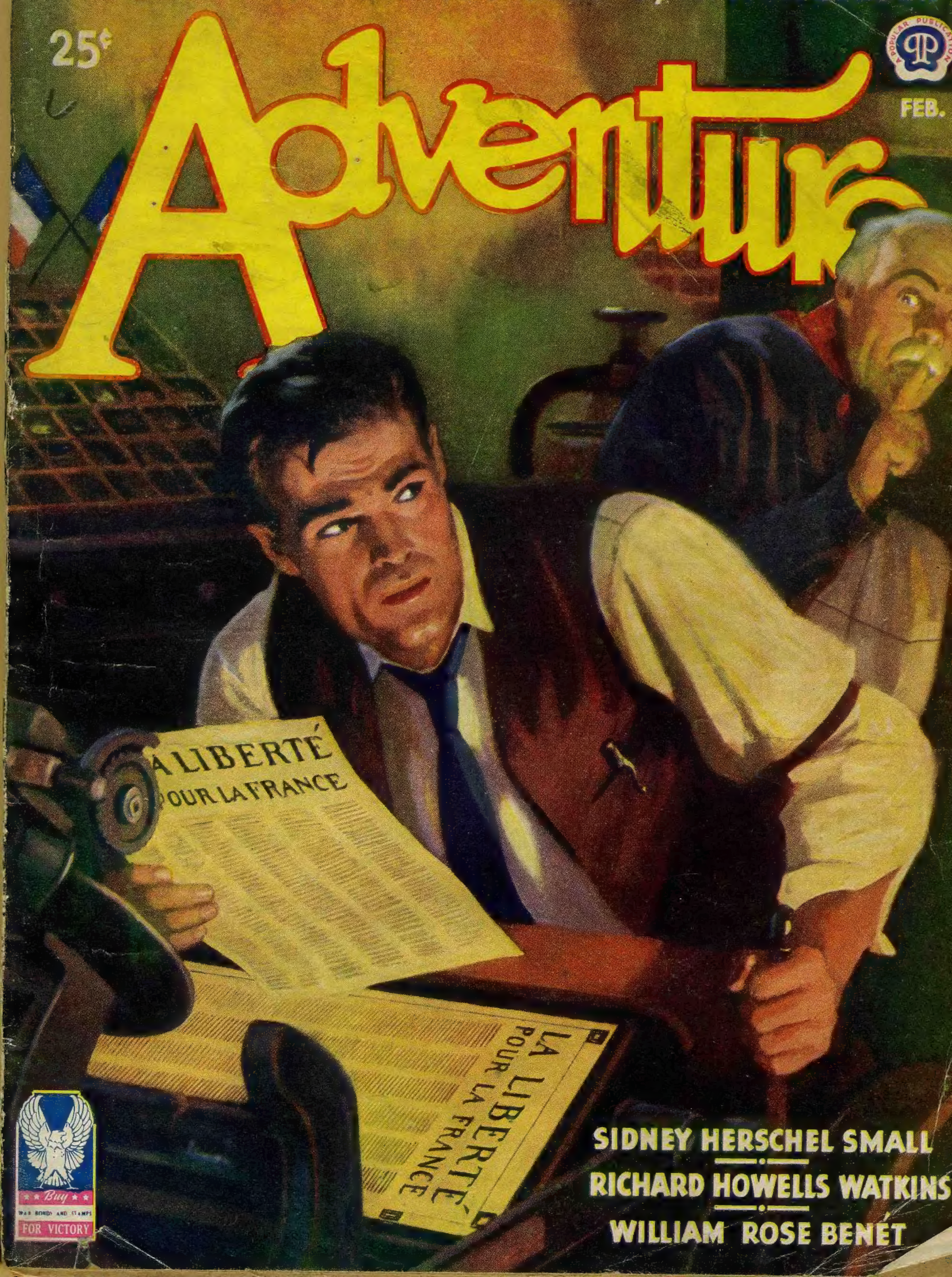
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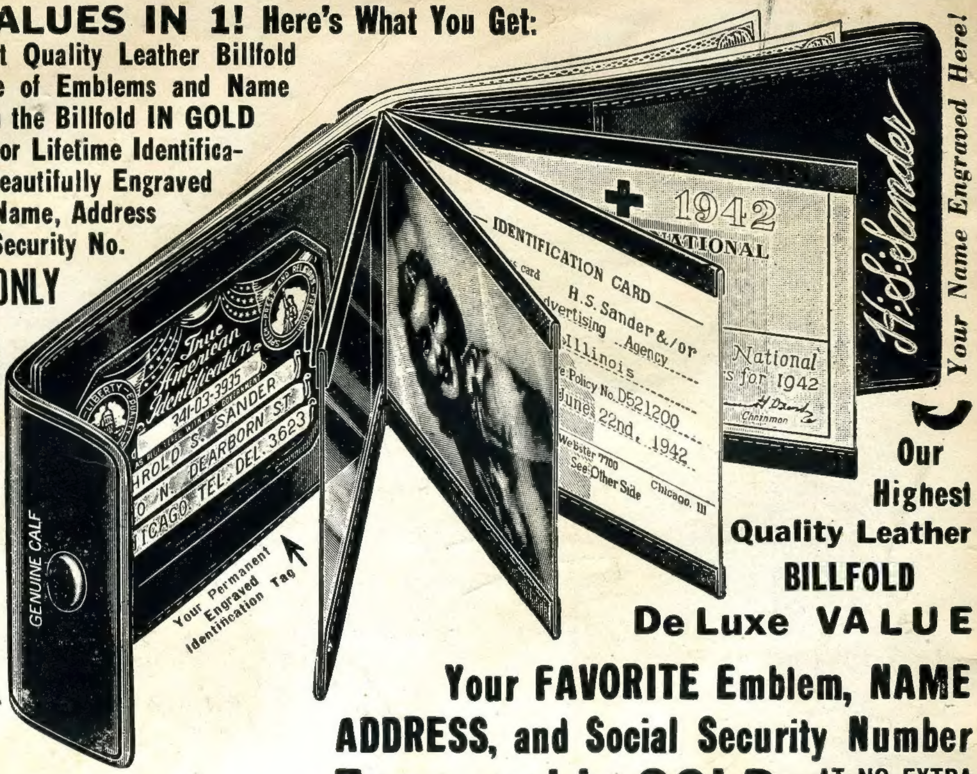
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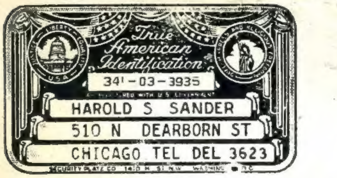
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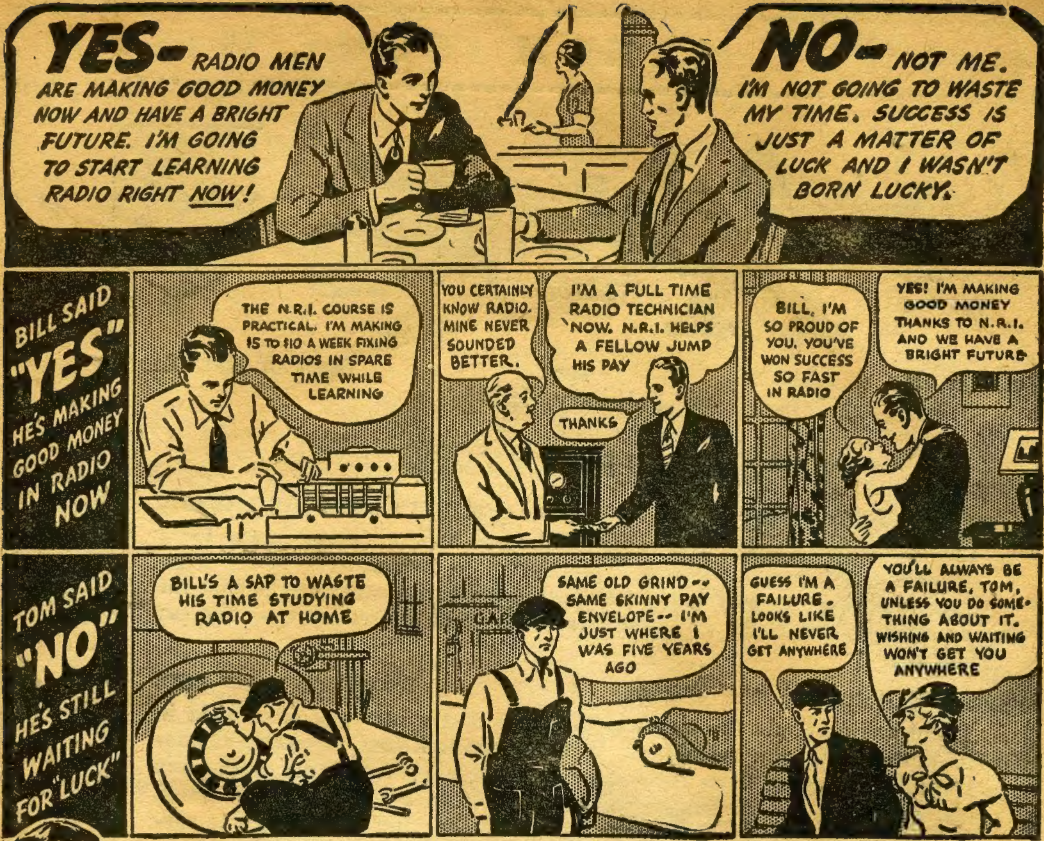
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TOM SAID "NO" HE'S STILL WAITING FOR "LUCK"
BILL'S A SAP TO WASTE HIS TIME STUDYING RADIO AT HOME
SAME OLD GRIND— SAME SKINNY PAY ENVELOPE— I'M JUST WHERE I WAS FIVE YEARS AGO
GUESS I'M A FAILURE. LOOKS LIKE I'LL NEVER GET ANYWHERE
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Vol. 110, No. 4 for February, 1944 Best of New Stories

NOVELETTES

Beyond the Call of Duty . . . . SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL 56

Lieutenant Lew Davies, AC, masquerading as a pariah Ainu in the heart of war-crazed Nippon, makes a pilgrimage by lanternlight to the Funkagawa shrine—to prey but not to pray—and proves once again, that the *Amerika-jin* can strike at Japland from the land as well as from the sea and air.

Something Rotten in the Floridas . . . . . . WILLIAM DU BOIS 96

There was no doubt the play was the thing that winter season of 1838 in the fastnesses of the Everglades. Wasn't Melville Keane, the world-famous tragedian, hanging them from the rafters from St. Augustine to Picoalta Ford and back to Fort King? No wonder Hospetarkee, the Seminole chief, became infected by the contagious reek of grease paint and decided to substitute sock and buskin for his customary suits of feathered black as he took to the war path. Or that young Captain Carter should ride into ambush echoing the yell "Lay on, Macduff!"

SHORT STORIES

Buffalo Magic . . . . PAUL ANNIXTER 46

They were both patriarchs—the big bull bison who had seen Cheyenne, Dakota and Sioux ride forth to fight the whites and each other; and old Juan Pina whose wrinkles were a carven record of the grim gone days. It was entirely fitting that the two ancients, man and beast, should meet as they did in the Sangre de Cristo foothills to watch the last wisp of smoke from the fire of a lost era curl away across the horizon.

Court Ship . . . . RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS 78

There was not a man aboard the *Margaret Blackenham*, who didn't have advice to offer Willie Potter in his wooing. "Take the girl by storm. Manhood, muscles, braggadocio, if necessary—" was the skipper's system. "Melt the wee lassie wi' the curl in your hair and woo her saft," was the engineer's dictum. Both of which suggestions had their merit, of course, but neither seemed to appeal to Willie.

IF YOUR COPY OF THIS MAGAZINE IS LATE—

We regret that, due to the difficulties of wartime transportation, your *Adventure* may sometimes be a little late in reaching you. If this should happen, your patience will be appreciated. Please do not write complaining of the delay. It occurs after the magazine leaves our offices and is caused by conditions beyond our control.

—The Publishers.

BE OUT ON FEBRUARY 11TH ◆◆◆

Black Angel with Big Feet . . . . CHRISTIAN FOLKARD 88

When Sergeant Talibi of the Papuan Infantry Battalion returned from his one-man punitive expedition in the Owen Stanley Mountains his report to headquarters—"Japan-man no good, *taubada.* I catchem onetime"—told only one eighth of the story. It was up to Lieutenant Jason, the American "man from air" to fill in the gaps.

Highballing Granny . . . . KEITH EDGAR 141

With the gauge registering just over 250 and the Johnson bar in the company notch, Crazy McIntosh and Dirty Dolan take their ease in the cab while Bub the brakeman shepherds fifty-five cars of war freight from St. Thomas to Buffalo by rule of thumb.

SERIALS

Traitor Unknown (1st of 3 parts) . . . . M. V. HEBERDEN 12

Plummeting through the night toward the world's new Dark Continent, Brandon of British Intelligence parachutes to the core of Gestapo-ridden France in a perilous attempt to plug the leaks in the underground pipeline he himself had laid, early in the war, for funneling information across the Channel to Allied Invasion Headquarters.

Where Nests the Water-Snake (Conclusion) . . MERLE CONSTINER 114

To Cincinnati, boisterous boom town on Ohio's shore, rides King Bodette, still searching for the serpent's nest he knows lies hidden in the shadows of the city's wharves. It doesn't take him long to tangle with the evil coils and set about his scotching.

THE FACT STORY

Arctic Attack . . . . KURT SINGER 150

Three times it has changed hands—the last free Norwegian outpost—in a fabulous, bloody game of shuttle-cock played with bombs and bullets under a freezing midnight sun.

VERSE

Men of the Hurricane . . . . WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT 10

Reach for your rip-cord! It's the Browning guns! Fuel eighty-seven octane. . . . Here comes the engine with the Merlin heart—there flies the Hurricane!

DEPARTMENTS

The Camp-Fire . . . . . Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 6
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Kenneth S. White, Editor

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THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

ALL contributors but two on the contents page this month—the authors of the new serial and the fact story—are veterans of our Writers' Brigade. We'll let M. V. Heberden (and it was like pulling teeth to get the author of "Traitor Unknown" up to the fire) take first turn at stoking the blaze—

> This sort of thing makes me definitely unhappy. Given a reasonable length of time I might produce a passable essay on the incidence of hay-fever among the Moros or even on the effect of Hegel on 20th Century thinking—but not a biographical sketch. One just can't make interesting material out of all the things that did NOT happen so this is going to be a very short workout of the perpendicular pronoun.
>
> I was born in 1906, raised and educated in the routine way and in 1924, having lived mostly in England and Ireland, I came to America. Since then my activities have ranged from Broadway shows to book keeping and the writing of considerable fiction with some wanderings in France and Germany, Spain, Algeria, Morocco and the Caribbean in between. Not being one of those remarkable individuals who act as magnets for weird events and somehow manage to run into melodrama every time they go to the delicatessen for half a dozen bottles of beer, nothing occurred in these travels which warrants wasting paper, particularly in view of the current shortage of same. I was never held up, beaten, robbed or even arrested though a frontier official once delayed me at Oujda on the Moroccan border for two hours because he couldn't read the stamp on my passport made by his own government.
>
> As for "Traitor Unknown"—it's background is a little university town in northern France where my mother went to school and where I might have been sent, also, if the war (the 1914-18 one) had not intervened. I was first in France as a youngster in 1919 when that last occupation was still fresh in mind and it made an impression which subsequent visits have never erased. During this war, stories have trickled out of the German held territory. The main trouble is that the people who know and do things aren't much given to talking. However, sufficient patience is sometimes rewarded by fragments. From the fragments one can build a yarn but one feels depressed and a little impertinent in the knowledge that the true story, if one could get it, would be infinitely more thrilling.

(Continued on page 8)

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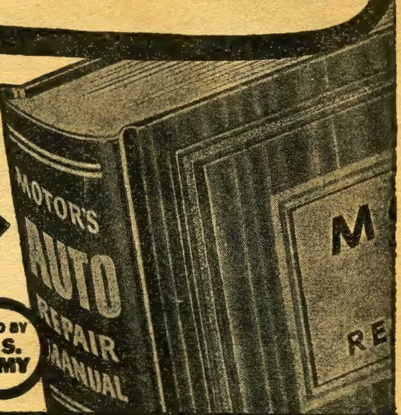

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(Continued from page 6)

THE author of "Arctic Attack" was off on a lecture tour when we tried to round him up for this *CF* session and mails being what they are these days our request for a personal word didn't catch up with him in time to get an answer back before going to press. We were able, however, to glean a few details about him elsewhere, just enough to make us want to know more. We promise to have some additional material in a later issue.

Kurt Singer is a veteran of the underground war against Hitler. As a European journalist, the Nazis once issued a warrant for high treason against him, for at the age of 21 he issued one of the earliest underground newspapers. In Sweden a few years later, he led the Swedish Free Ossietsky campaign. In that country he was also arrested and held a short time when Goering demanded that the Swedish government confiscate Singer's biography of the Lufwaffe chief.

In July 1940 he escaped from Scandinavia to the United States where he has already made a name as a journalist, contributing special articles to leading newspapers and magazines, and authoring the best-seller "*Duel for the Northland*," as well as filling numerous lecture engagements.

Born in Vienna in 1911, he has lived in eight different countries and has published twelve books in various languages. One of these, a biography of Pastor Niemoeller, became a Swedish best-seller, and his biography of Goering was published in England.

His wife, who was held as a hostage after her husband left Nazi Germany, is now with him in the United States with their three year old daughter.

WILLIAM DU BOIS, whose new Captain Carter novelette appears on page 96 of this issue, sends along the following note on the origin of the yarn—

> When I was growing up in St. Augustine, Florida, it was standard practice for most of us boys to bedevil Sergeant Brown. The sergeant was caretaker and guide at the Old Spanish Fort. Not the least of his duties was shooing local small fry away from ramparts, cannon-mounts, and the hot-shot oven during the tourist season.
>
> At the time, I thought of the sergeant as slightly older than God, and no less implacable in his judgments. He wore a faded fatigue uniform, and a cavalryman's mustache that had degenerated into a discouraged white blizzard with his advancing years. But he was a real old soldier for all that, the bellow he could raise, when he caught a small boy swinging from the porte-cullis, was something to remember in your nightmares.
>
> Over a quarter-century later, when I was doing research at the New York public library for these stories of the Seminole War, I was surprised to find that Sergeant Brown had also been an historian in his day, a salty volume of Florida anecdotes, culled from the sergeant's own browsing in the St. Augustine archives, was on file in the American History room. One of them has been used as a springboard for "Something Rotten in the Floridas". . . . I hope you'll agree that it's the sort of thing that *should* have happened in the midst of an Indian war, if only to brighten a tough job of soldiering.

AND Lt. Col. X, USA (we'll have to call him that for we can't decipher his signature) writes from Hutchinson, Kansas taking us and Du Bois to task for letting what appeared to be errors and anachronisms creep into the text of "Red Justice" in our November '43 issue. Here are the specific items on which our critic chides us—

> P. 64—"corps area"—a post-World War term. 40 years ago there were divisions and departments. 100 years ago —? Probably departments.
>
> P. 65—"matches"—am not sure they were in use yet.
>
> P. 67—"post of command"—A French term adopted and adapted in 1917-18.
>
> P. 69—Even the use of "efficiency" unusual then—in fact a theological term.
>
> P. 71—"pragmatist" term later invented by William James.
>
> P. 72—"manifest destiny"—20th century.
>
> P. 74—"pet-cocks"—am not sure—not good reference books at hand.
>
> P. 78—"torpedo"—?—at Mobile Bay in 1864, Farragut's "damned" torpedoes were mines.

And here are Author Du Bois' comments in return, "with and without alibis"—

> P. 64—"Corps area". I'm afraid that *was* a slip on my part. Of course, The U.S. Army was only a few thousand strong in those days!
>
> P. 65—"Matches". This is definitely our round. The lucifer friction-match

(Continued on page 154)

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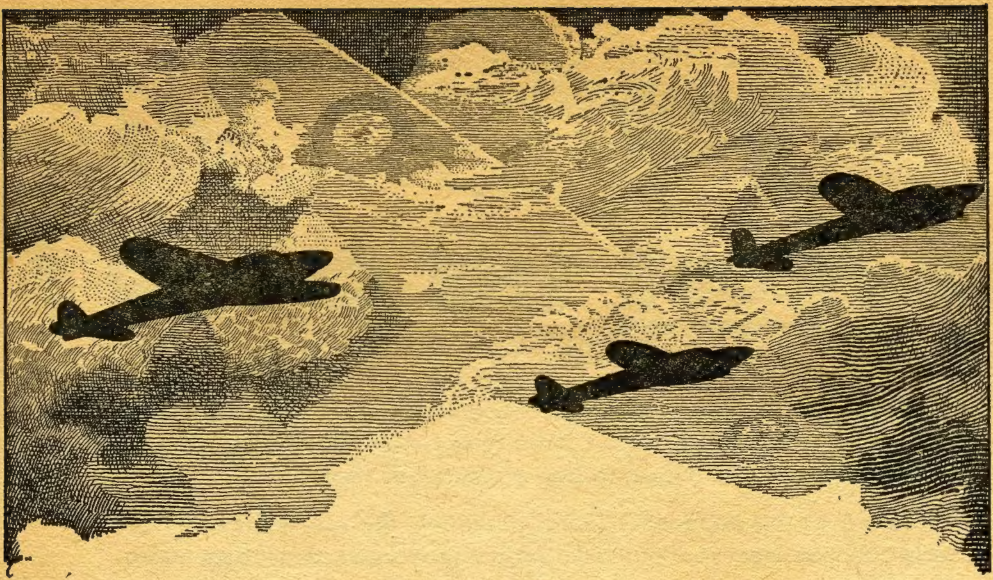


MEN of the HURRICANE

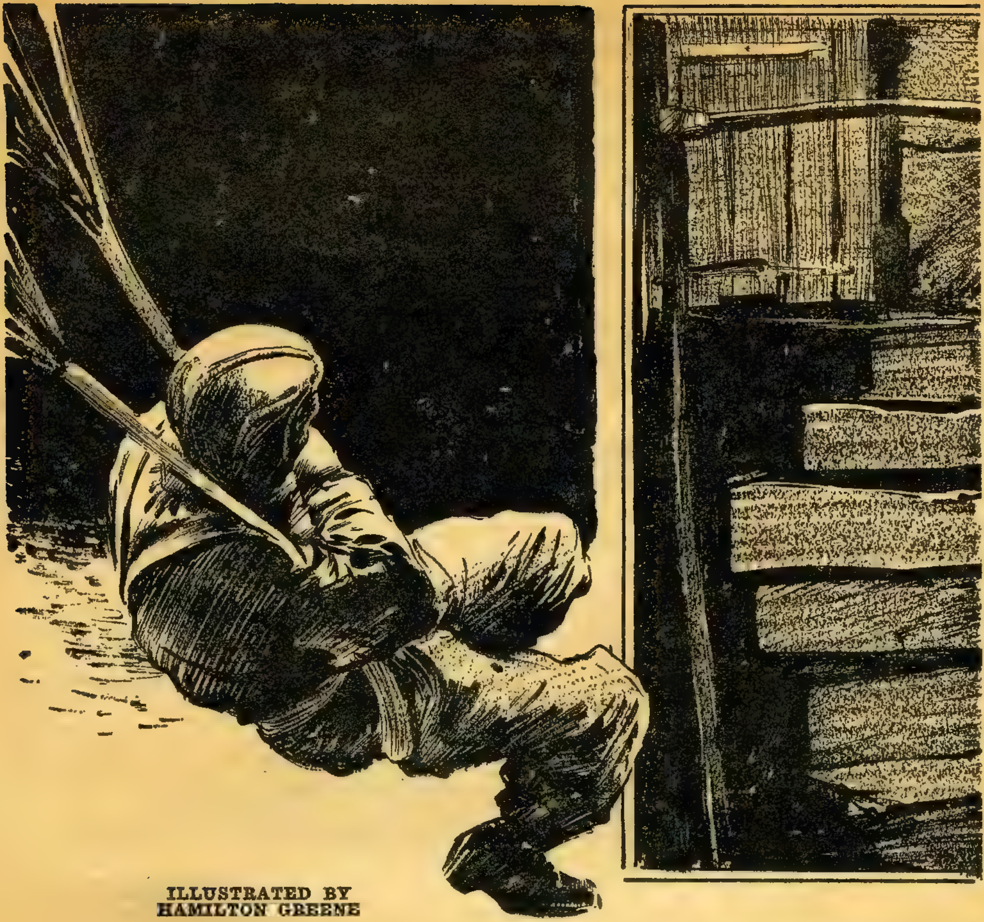
By

WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

Over the Channel as the daylight dies from the Norman Coast to Spain,
What is this phantom of the night that flies with the hawk and the hurricane?
Bright Autumn days of Thirty-Nine when the first fast planes were flown
Aloft from France, near the quiet Line, where the Hun Verdun had known,
Where of old they knew when the Boche marched through, and their wives and their daughters died. . . .
Now, in a war that was old—and new—here were new lads enskied,
Gosse of a *gosse*, out of Angleterre, rocketing 'round the skies,
With one "beat-up" more of their spire to dare, till the *curé* closed his eyes,
Closed tight his eyes and pronounced his prayer to the Copertino Saint
That the wild daredevils that swooped through the air might spare his church's paint!
"Ye have seen how I bare you on eagles' wings!" he mouthed with a trembling nod,
For surely good Joseph should know these things, who had flown by the grace of God!
But the wild lads were faithful as fliers are, on patrols as they were then,
Though they drank a bit at a home-made bar, they'd the minds of sober men,
And high as they looped or rolled or spun, or "beating-up" low roared by,
Their eyes were peeled for the Hun in the sun, though he still held aloof on high.
Such were the chaps of the Seventy-Third and the old First Squadron men
That Neuville knew—with the off-hand word, and aloft to the skies again.
Reach for your ripcord! It's the Browning guns! Fuel eighty-seven octane,
Here comes the engine with the Merlin heart—there flies the Hurricane!

Winter on Rouvres' rough flying-ground near the Line called Maginot;
Mud to the hubs, or the wide wings found under drifts of freezing snow. . . .
Till the Nazi blight lay on France in bloom as the Spring toiled up that way,
And the spitting guns spelt the Messerschmitts' doom through the wild blitz days of May.
High hearts, high deeds! as the lads alive, be they Eire or Auckland born,
Pulled wide the "boost" for a swerve or a dive, exalting England's horn
With their English pals of the high free fames, where the sky in the dog-fight reels.
Shells in the engine, "office" in flames—but they never put down their wheels!
"Get cracking now!" And the way was shown to mount to the clouds and win;
With fresh young voices in the radio-phone: "Mix it!" and "Let's tap in!"
So whisk her around in a snug tight turn and blaze away on his tail,
Till he streaks it down from the flames that burn, with a pluming long black trail.
For they're high in the heavens, they are fighting all: "Red" or "Bull" or "The Lion" one
With the "Terrible Child" and "Ginger" Paul. They are diving out of the sun
To get their ship, or get torn a strip—peel off and plunge from the height
For that Heinkel or ME's last trip, that is caught in the round ring-sight.
And there blows the wind with the Austral breath, in a low-slung monoplane:
Four guns on a side, all spouting death, from the wings of Cobber Kain.
Men in their twenties, first to fight till the Nazis hared from the blue
In the early days when they held the height, ere the darker days we knew. . . .
Yes—and then, from the clouds' steep ridge to the sun-shot smiling lands,
The boys who fought above Maastricht bridge like their peers above Dunkirk sands—
Who faced all the fury of the Third Reich's might when the flooding hordes burst through,
Attacking from dawn through to dark midnight, tally-ho with a tough hard few. . . .
Yes, Coastal or Bomber or Fighter Command, here on high were your first to meet
The foe at grips and from close-at-hand, with the sting of a first defeat.
Yes, Hudson crews over Norway's coast; Sunderlands, far at sea;
Here were the first to choke the boast in the throat of the enemy!
Fighter stations of English shires, that met and that broke the Hun,
Here were your first, with kindred fires, to see that that deed was done.
An hundred wrecks on the Western front ere the long retreat was through
Shot down by the brave who bore the brunt, who sleepless fought and flew. . . .
And the Spitfires came, and the Bombers came, and the Luftwaffe's threat was gone,
And the Rhineland Valley was one vast flame rolling smoke to a darkened dawn.
Here was war they had wished, dense war, fierce war that the Nazis had hoped might be—
But the bomb-loads were loosed from each bomb-bay door on high over Germany!
And now, when their ruin smokes to the skies, with their World Dream blasted and vain,
What is the phantom through the night that flies, like hawk or like hurricane?
Reach for your ripcord! It is Cobber Kain—young Clisby's engine heard—
It's the old First Squadron over France again, and the men of the Seventy-Third!

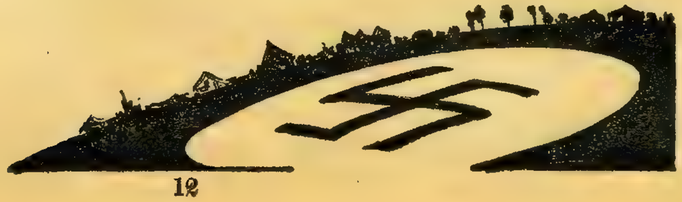
DECORATIONS BY L. STERNE STEVENS

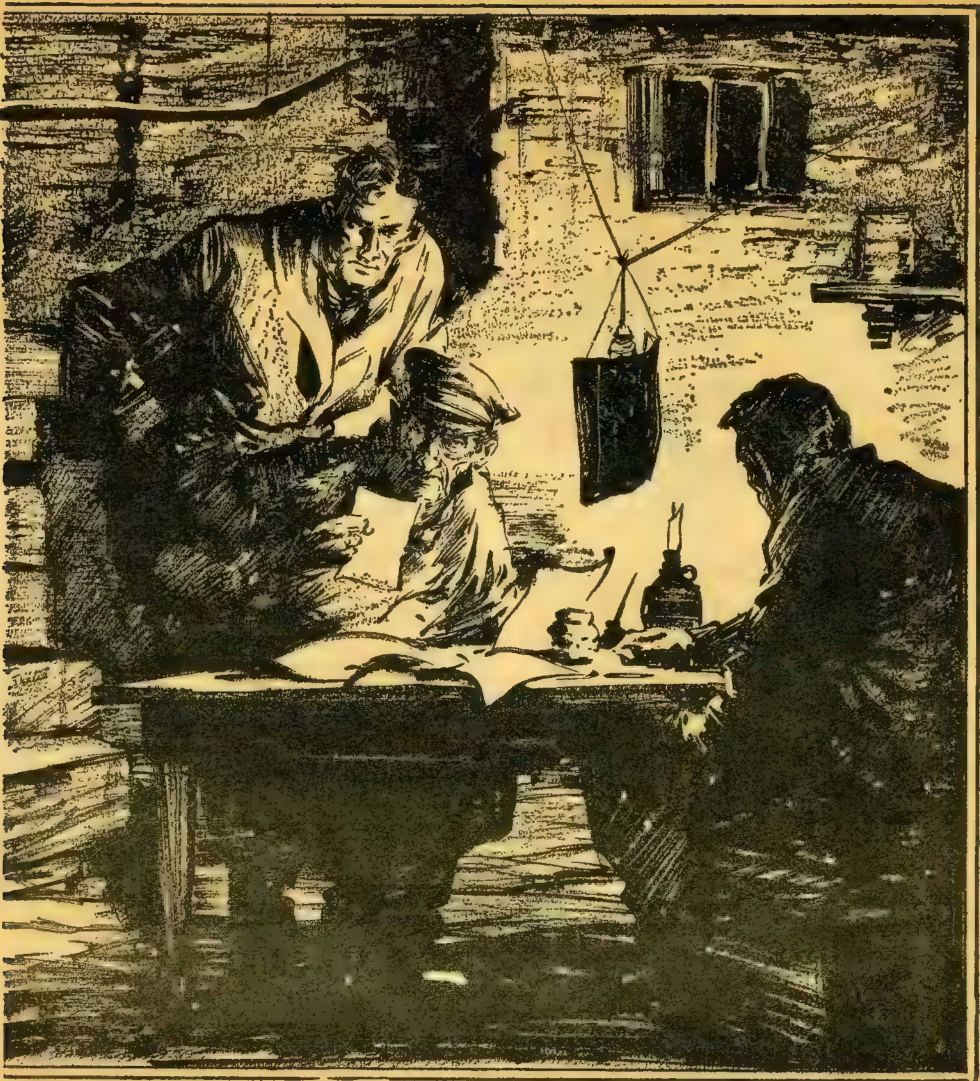


ILLUSTRATED BY
HAMILTON GREENE

TRAITOR UNKNOWN

By M. V. HEBERDEN





Cibault worked painstakingly and slowly on Brandon's identification papers. When he finally professed himself satisfied it would have been hard to tell that they had been tampered with.

"ONE would almost say, my friend, that you were afraid of the man!" There was an undercurrent of amusement in the faintly foreign accent and the small brown eyes of the dark, rotund little man were bent with quizzical speculation on the officer who sat behind a desk which, at this moment, was piled with a chaotic array of papers.

The rotund little man was Monsieur Rodopin and he had known the British Intelligence officer for a great many years; it was only a man who had known Colonel Smithshand for a great many years who would make a remark like that or at least, make it with impunity.

The Whitehall office in which they sat was very quiet with the dead quietness that comes from soundproofing. Smithshand, who was head of a branch of the Foreign Office Intelligence Service, surveyed a large-scale map of northwestern France which hung slightly askew on the wall opposite him as if he were weighing his friend's remark.

Rodopin

"Perhaps I am," he said at last. "But he's the man for this job. He's never had a failure."

"And how long has this so successful agent been with Intelligence?" queried Rodopin.

"Since the last war. He has a phenomenal flair for languages and, as I say, he never fails. But—"

"But what, my friend? Are you going to tell me that this paragon has some faults? *Parbleu,* the man has a gift for languages and he never fails and you say 'but'!"

Smithshand got up and walked over to the map; he didn't really look at it. He ran his fingers through hair of an odd shade that was caused by the fact that he had been very fair and was now going gray, and turned back to Rodopin.

"It's a confession that I would not make to many people, Rodopin. I've handled men all my life and the least of my troubles is obtaining obedience and keeping discipline. But I am never sure with him."

"You mean he is—how shall I say it—disobedient?"

The colonel smiled over the word. Its schoolboy implication seemed peculiarly ludicrous when applied to the slender, still-faced man with cold gray eyes whom they were discussing. "Not disobedient," he said. "He never queries orders. That is, he never did but once."

"Oh-ho! The paragon was undisciplined once! It is good to hear that he is human."

"He isn't, Rodopin. That's just it. I never feel I'm dealing with a human being. If he were human, he'd fail sometimes."

"But, *mon vieux,* you do not want your agents to fail."

"Of course not. But I sometimes wonder how he succeeds and find myself being glad that I don't know." Smithshand gave a short laugh with a touch of embarrassment in it.

"I would like to hear about the one occasion when your inhuman paragon argued with you."

"HE didn't. That was the point. He just said no. He's Irish and, in 1920, Mallison, who was still chief then, wanted to send him to Ireland. He sat where you're sitting now and listened to all Mallison had to say with a perfectly expressionless face and then said, 'I'm sorry. I refuse to go.' The chief pointed out that it was insubordination and so on and he listened with a politely bored expression. At the end he got up and asked if that were all."

"Were charges brought?"

Smithshand made a grimace. "He was too valuable and he had a chestful of decorations. It wouldn't have been politic. No, Mallison decided that he was ill and needed a long sick leave. So he was given it and when he came back, was sent somewhere else."

"Perhaps he sympathized with the Irish—how do you call them—Insurgents?"

"God knows what he sympathizes with, if anything. His family have always fought for the Crown. His father was a naval officer."

"In the British Navy?"

"Yes. Probably only because the Irish didn't have one. Two of his uncles were in Indian regiments. Three of his brothers are. Perhaps I should say were. Two of them haven't been heard of since the fall of Singapore. Another brother batted around the world fighting in any war he could find. He's with the R.A.F. now."

"He interests me," said Rodopin. "When am I to meet him? I thought he was going to be here."

"He should be. I've had him brought back from India," he added with a half smile, "so that should show you how important I think this job is." He pressed a buzzer under the desk and a tired-looking lieutenant came in. "Hasn't Major Brandon arrived yet?"

"No, sir. But they telephoned from the field that his plane had landed and that he was on his way up to London."

Rodopin could scarcely wait for the tired lieutenant to leave the room. "Not the Brandon who organized the Northwestern zone?"

"Yes. Didn't I tell you his name? I thought I had."

"*Sacrebleu!* The almost legendary Major Brandon!"

"After the armistice when everything was so disorganized, none of the groups of saboteurs were operating together. They realized their own enormous potential nuisance value in France and so did we, but they didn't know enough about sabotage to make it effective. We were ready to supply equipment and instructions. Brandon was given the assignment and he did a magnificent job."

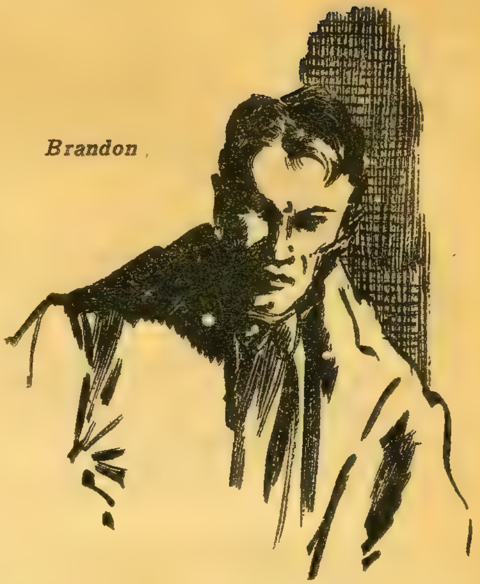
"Yes, yes, of course. But we heard that Major Brandon had been killed."

"No. Things finally got too hot for him and he had to get out. But he'd done his job." Smithshand was silent for a moment. "There was a woman," he said at last.

"He does not sound so inhuman to me. He is fond of the ladies?"

The colonel shook his head. "I've never discovered anything he was fond of," he said irritably. "There have been women here, there and everywhere, and he'd cheerfully push them over the edge of a cliff if it suited his purpose at the moment. But, according to the reports, this one was different. I was told he wanted to marry her and bring her to England."

"But he didn't."



Brandon

"He only just got out alive himself, and she is still useful to us over there."

"Who is she?"

"Andrée Santrieul. She was a Paris actress but now she is singing in a café which is very popular with German officers."

Rodopin stared. "Andrée Santrieul! But she is—she is—well, my friend, one does not marry her."

"I know. What I don't know is whether that was the situation when Brandon last saw her. It's some time, you know. A lot may have happened since."

"You still think it is wise to send him? You are not afraid that if he discovers that things are—shall we say, not very picturesque—that it will impair his usefulness?"

"Whatever Brandon goes to do, he will do, Rodopin. Of that I am certain."

The door opened and the tired lieutenant reappeared. "Major Brandon is here, sir."

"Ask him to come in."

THERE was nothing superficially terrifying about the man who came in. He was about five feet eleven and very dark. The fact that he badly needed a shave made his rather gaunt face look almost black. He was not in uniform and his clothes were, not to put too fine a point on it, dirty. The trench coat quite obviously did not belong to him.

He said, "Colonel—" and for a second the light gray eyes flicked to the other man. "Monsieur Rodopin."

Smithshand said, "It's good to see you, Brandon. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. Drink?"

"Thanks."

"I didn't know you had met Rodopin," he said as he splashed whiskey into a glass, and turned a questioning eye as he held the siphon.

"That's enough, sir, thanks . . . Monsieur Rodopin was pointed out to me in the café of the Hotel St. Georges in Cäen one night as someone who was sympathetic to the Allied cause." He swallowed some of his drink and continued, "I stole eleven thousand francs from him."

"*Nom d'un nom!* You are the so unmentionable scoundrel who took my wallet that night!" exploded Rodopin.

"I needed money in a hurry. It would have taken too long and been too dangerous to explain. I'm sure Colonel Smithshand will repay it."

"D'you have to steal from our friends?" inquired Smithshand.

"If he had caught me, he would not have given me away," replied Brandon with a look of faint surprise. He turned back to the Frenchman. "I am glad to be able to apologize to you."

"I begin to see why your Major Brandon is always so successful, my friend," laughed Rodopin a trifle ruefully. "He is a highly accomplished pickpocket."

"It is useful sometimes," said Brandon negligently.

The colonel began to outline the mission that Brandon had been fetched halfway around the world to undertake. "The organization that covers this territory"—he drew a wide arc with his hand over the northwestern part of France which was marked *Zone One* on the map—"has continued to function as you set it up and with unbelievable success. More success than we dared hope in our wildest dreams." Smithshand paused and looked as if he expected a comment.

"What has gone wrong with it now?" asked Brandon.

"There are leaks of information. Men betrayed. Lists of sympathizers furnished to the Gestapo."

Brandon nodded as if he had taken it for granted that it would happen. "You can't make an organization like that completely fool-proof or traitor-proof," he said carelessly.

"You take it very calmly, the idea that we have traitors in our midst!" exclaimed Rodopin.

"It's a damned nuisance." Brandon seemed mildly surprised at the Frenchman's vehemence. "But organizations are like engines. They run for just so long, then you have to take them apart and clean them."

"You'll go over the reports, of course, and I'll tell you all I can about it," resumed Smithshand. "It's going to be your job to clean the engine." The man nodded. No one could have told whether the prospect pleased him or otherwise.

"I wanted you to meet Monsieur Rodopin," continued Smithshand, "because when you've familiarized yourself with the latest reports, he will take you to Monsieur St. Paul."

"St. Paul? I don't know him."

"He is the liaison man between the underground and the officially recognized French here."

Some time later, Monsieur Rodopin left, still looking with slightly irritated apprehension at the so unmentionable scoundrel who had stolen his wallet.

"I'm sure he's standing outside the door counting his money and looking to see that he's got his watch," remarked Brandon idly. "Just who is he?"

"BEFORE the war he published newspapers in Cäen, Rouen, Havre and several other places. He's been a great deal of help to us and he does a lot for the French refugees here. I've known him for twenty years." Smithshand paused a moment then went on. "He can feel the pulse of a nation. I trust his judgment on the morale of a country more than any other man's. He's just back from two months in France, most of it in Normandy.

"The situation is serious. It's rendering the whole organization useless. Whoever the traitors are, they have an uncanny way of knowing which plans are important—and those are the ones that are sold out, every time. Attempts have been made locally to trace the leak and we've sent men. Several suspected people have been shot. But the leaks go on."

"Sounds as if it were high up."

"It isn't just *a* leak. It's a network. No one man could have had all the information that the Gestapo has obtained, unless it was someone like Arnaudet. And if the district chiefs are traitors—" Smithshand finished with a weary shrug.

"How much time have I got?" asked Brandon.

"Very little. On Monday week we have an operation scheduled which must not fail."

"And today is Saturday. Nine days. I see why I wasn't allowed time for a bath or shave. What is this operation which must be successful?"

"Large scale raids." Smithshand went over to the map and indicated a number of points on the coast between Havre and Ostend. Then for some time he outlined coming military strategy in several widely separated theatres, including the Mediterranean and the Middle East. "The raids must synchronize with operations in the other theatres. They will be on a sufficiently large scale to keep Jerry worried that it may be a full-dress invasion."

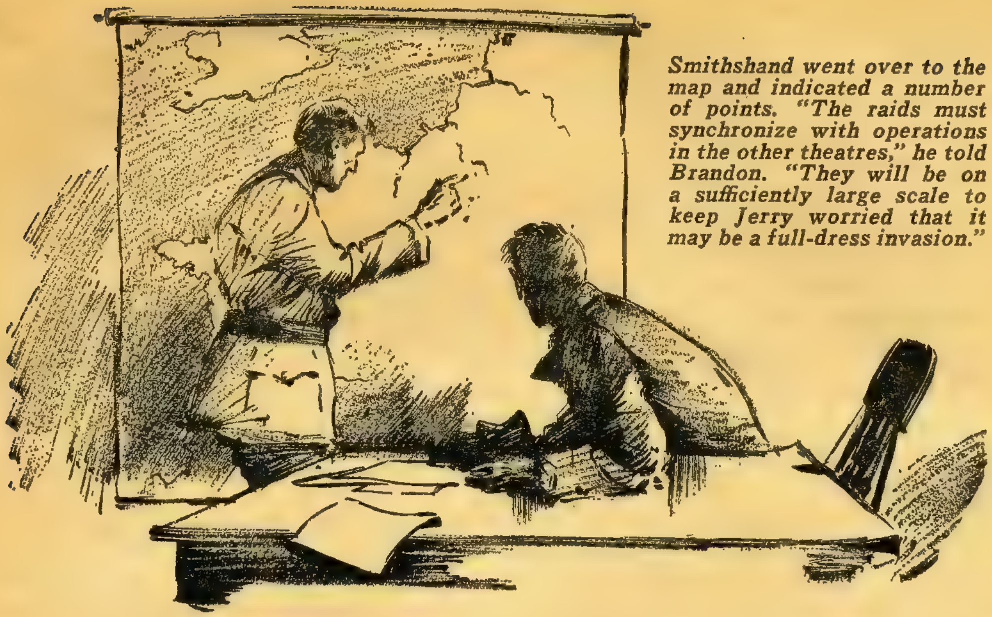
Brandon nodded. "So that no troops will be withdrawn. I see."

"Fairly extensive inland operations are planned, with the use of a number of parachute and glider troops. Roughly, in an arc here." His pencil flicked a semicircle from Lille to Cäen. "You will go over the staff maps later. We've been depending on the help of the underground organization in that zone. The equipment is there; the men have been trained. But until and unless the leaks can be stopped, it's useless."

Brandon nodded again. "Discovery of any part of the plan would tip Jerry off to the whole thing."

"The time's too short to plant enough new men to do the job. We've got to use the existing organization. But no

You're sure in line for shaving joy
When you use Thin Gillettes, my boy!
These blades last long—four cost a dime—
You look well-groomed, save dough and time!
Top quality at rock-bottom price
THIN Gillette BLADES
Gillette
4 for 10¢
Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade



Smithshand went over to the map and indicated a number of points. "The raids must synchronize with operations in the other theatres," he told Brandon. "They will be on a sufficiently large scale to keep Jerry worried that it may be a full-dress invasion."

instructions must be given until you're absolutely sure there will be no betrayal."

"Then as well as finding the traitors, I have to give instructions?" Brandon raised one dark eyebrow.

"Yes."

"Cuts into the nine days," he objected. "That usually takes three or four days for any large-scale operations."

A little later Smithshand asked whether he wanted to get at the reports now or whether he wanted to go to his club first.

"I haven't a shirt to my name and God knows if I've a uniform nearer than Calcutta. I'd better go to the club, get a bath and a shave and see if there's anyone around who's my size. I need some money. The colonel called the tired lieutenant and told him to look after the major.

"I thought you'd need an assistant, Brandon. Whom d'you want? You can have your choice of anyone who's available."

"Is Ted Larrabee around?"

"He was killed in Crete."

The sardonic expression on the dark, unshaven face didn't change. "Harry Alsop?"

"Killed in Alexandria."

For a second Brandon's gray eyes flicked over his superior's face. "Perhaps it would save time if you told me who is available," he said.

Smithshand mentioned several names but Brandon shook his head. "Lennet's too eager. One has to keep a leash on him. Sutter's French is fluent but the accent is murderous, like most Englishmen's. Knight's is good."

"Knight's a good man," agreed Smithshand. "He thinks all the world of you."

"I know," replied Brandon calmly. "He invests me with most of the attributes of divinity. It has its advantages, of course. One doesn't argue with God."

"I thought you might want him, so I told him to stand by."

TWELVE hours later, Monsieur Rodopin sat with Brandon and St. Paul in a shabby service flat in Russell Square, for it was thought that fewer people would know if Monsieur St. Paul interviewed a British Intelligence officer at the latter's home on a Sunday, than if they met at his office; and the fewer people who knew anything, the better.

The inhuman scoundrel looked more presentable today, thought Rodopin. He had acquired some clean clothes that were a passable fit, shaved and had a haircut.

"I don't like making plans, Monsieur St. Paul," he was saying. "When I reach the spot, I'll see what seems best to be done."

Monsieur St. Paul, a tall, handsomely distinguished man who looked tired and worried, rubbed the bridge of his prominent nose and said, "Colonel Smithshand wished to detail one of his own men to this matter." There was a hint of offended prestige in the words, offset by a half apologetic smile. "I can understand his point of view, of course. He feels that his own men, especially you, Major, are more competent than others. I had hoped that we would be able to get this so disgraceful affair cleared up ourselves. We are making some progress."

"I gathered some men had been shot," anwered Brandon noncommittally.

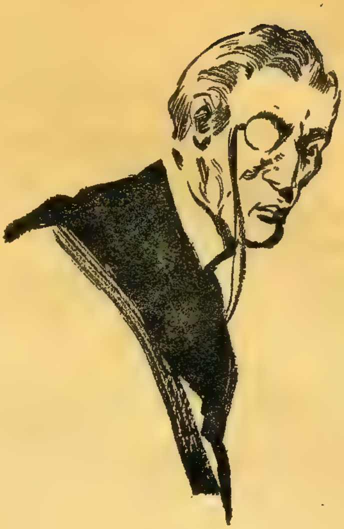
"It is hard to believe that any of the men who have worked for us so faithfully would now betray us."

"There seems to be very adequate proof that they do," said the Britisher drily.

"It hurts, monsieur. It hurts my pride as a Frenchman."

One dark eyebrow crawled up Brandon's forehead. "Why? A certain percentage of men anywhere are traitors if the opportunity offers. I doubt whether the percentage varies much in any nation." He spoke carelessly, his eyes scanning a list of names that St. Paul had handed to him. "This is not a complete list for the northwest district."

"No. You yourself, monsieur, set up the organization so that as few members as possible know each other and that system has been followed. Even we here do not know who the district chiefs are and cannot communicate with them direct. It is a safeguard against betrayal, of course, and in the light of what has recently happened, we must be grateful to you. But in some ways it makes the handling of things from this end much more difficult. You, however, will be able to contact the chief of Zone One himself. You also will be in touch with your Intelligence agents, I suppose, which will be an additional help to you. I have a set of identity papers here in the name of Georges Boutry. His description matched the one of you that I obtained from Smithshand. You will instruct your pilot to drop you here." He spread out a large-scale map of the Department of Somme and pointed to a spot which was marked with an *X*. "The signal is two white, two red, repeated three times at ten-second intervals. Tissier, who will meet you, will direct you to Josserand. He is completely reliable and. . ." He went on talking for some time.



St. Paul

The plans had been carefully made. There seemed no possibility of a hitch.

CHAPTER II

BRANDON BAITS A TRAP

SOME hours before dawn, the following morning, a single plane approached the dark splotch of land that was France.

"But we're not going there," yelled Brandon in the ear of the pilot as he jabbed his finger on the spot marked with an *X* on the map. The pilot officer had undertaken several of these missions before and by now he was convinced that all members of all the Intelligence services were crazy, but he did wish that this man with the queer gray eyes hadn't waited until they were over the coast of France to alter his destination. However, he had to take orders from him, so he only said, "Where *are* we going, sir?"

"Here." Brandon took a pencil. "Circle the town to the north. This is the military supply dump, so give it a wide berth. Here's the canal. Come over it going southwest by south. That should bring you over it at this point."

The pilot agreed. "Then what, sir?"

"There's quite a stand of trees half a mile south of the canal and a field beyond them. Go in over the trees as low as you can and still give us enough height to drop down into the field."

"Yes, sir."

Lieutenant Frank Knight caught a glimpse of the puzzled resignation on the pilot's face and yelled, "What's up, sir?"

Laconically Brandon told him.

"But the fellow who's to signal?" he asked.

"Will get tired of waiting, I expect, and go home."

"You think Tissier might be one of the traitors?"

"Possibly. Also, his instructions are relayed to him through at least two other people. Our job, Knight, is to stay alive."

Frank Knight grinned. He had a nice grin, reddish hair and the kind of skin that suggested that he'd had freckles when he was a boy. He had. He possessed startlingly blue eyes and a rather wide mouth. All of this combined to make him look much younger than he was, and much more innocuous. When you studied the blue eyes, you noticed that experience had given them a shrewdness, and if you watched his mouth, you might observe that the lips set with considerable firmness. He was one of those people who are innately humble, though he didn't in the least suspect that he was. He was inclined to believe that most people were much cleverer than he was, which argued either an exaggeratedly cheerful view of the average human mentality or an equally exaggeratedly pessimistic opinion of his own. He was completely happy, for he was tremendously pleased that Brandon has chosen him for this job. He always enjoyed the prospect of action, and action in the company of this clever, iron-nerved Irishman whom he admired so much was about all he asked of life at the moment.

Knight was an American. He had been doing a year's post-graduate work at the Sorbonne in 1939 when France declared war, and he had joined up and served with the French Army until its fall. Then, with some other Americans and British in the same position, he had made his way to England to continue the fight. Because of his excellent French, he had been assigned to Intelligence, which was where he met Brandon for the first time. He had worked with him on a counter-espionage operation shortly afterward and had developed what could only be called a case of hero-worship for his coldly efficient superior.

The altitude from which the two men now made their jump was not sufficient for comfortable landing, but Knight experienced a feeling of pleased surprise when he found himself alive and, in spite of the jolt, with no broken bones.

Hurriedly bundling up their parachutes, they headed for the trees that stood like a black wall at one side of the field. As they reached this shelter, a burst of anti-aircraft fire came from the south. Knight turned. "They got him, the sons of bitches," he said a second later as he plunged into the darkness beside Brandon.

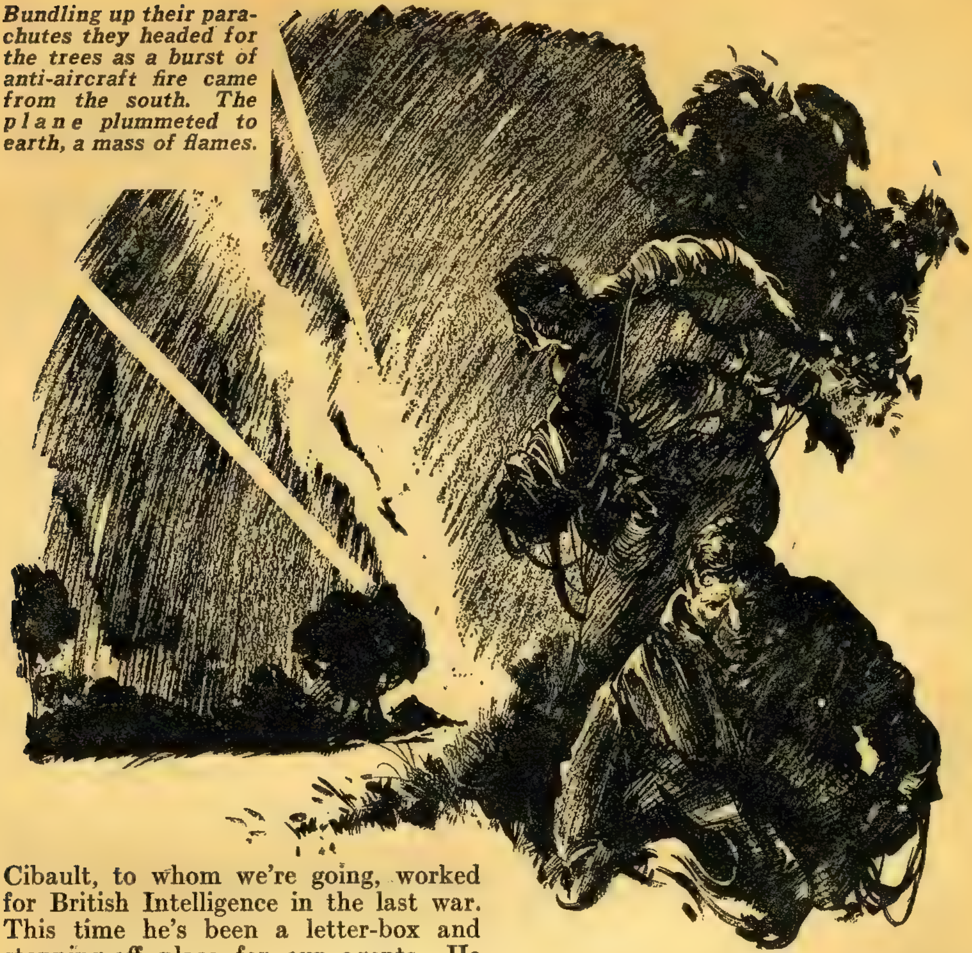
"Go down in flames?"

"Yes. Didn't look as if he had time to jump."

"That'll save us some trouble," the major observed.

Knight didn't say anything. He knew it was true. If they were known to be coming, it might be thought that they had perished in the plane. Yes, it was true; but he felt a little shiver go down his spine and it wasn't because he was afraid of a German patrol.

"THIS should bring us out on a side road," Brandon explained some time later. "I don't want to have to use this set of papers I have. This old man,



Bundling up their parachutes they headed for the trees as a burst of anti-aircraft fire came from the south. The plane plummeted to earth, a mass of flames.

Cibault, to whom we're going, worked for British Intelligence in the last war. This time he's been a letter-box and stopping-off place for our agents. He also furnishes forged papers. He knows nothing about the underground organization, except what the town knows."

An unpleasant pre-dawn rawness was in the air as they reached the outskirts of the town. Knight heard heavy footsteps and muttered, "Patrol." They ducked through a privet hedge and found themselves in a tiny garden. An overwhelming odor of rotten fish assailed their nostrils. Standing flat against the back wall of the house, Knight felt along it with his hand and encountered a garbage barrel. His hand reeked of fish.

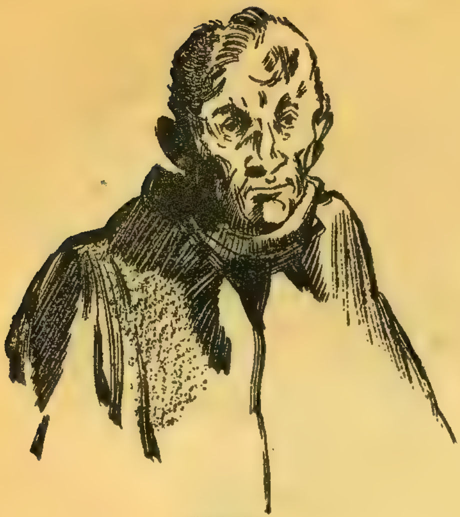
"Undercover work is so romantic," he murmured.

The heavy tread of the patrol approached, passed and died away. They emerged from the tiny garden and made their way across the bridge that spanned the canal, along the Rue St. Michel with its timbered houses, and across the old market place. Their destination was a small tobacco-candy-stationery store. The depressing dawn light showed three signs tacked to the window. *Pas de tabac, aujourd'hui, Pas de Chocolat* and *Aujourd'hui pas de papier*.

"He might close and go fishing," suggested Brandon as he led his companion round the back.

He knocked on a door that hadn't had a coat of paint since the Franco-Prussian war and waited, his eyes scanning the neighboring yards warily. After a while, a key rattled and the door opened, its squeaking hinges suggesting that the last application of oil antedated the paint.

"*Parbleu,* to wake a man at this hour! I have my papers and there was no light," the old man who came began



Cibault

to grumble before he could see who his visitors were.

"Sorry, Papa Cibault, but we don't want to be seen."

For a moment the rheumy eyes behind the crooked glasses stared and blinked. "Enter! But enter!" He nearly pulled them in.

"But you are dead more than two years!" he exclaimed when he had closed the door behind them.

"It's fish you smell, not rotting corpses," Brandon told him cheerfully. "Will we be safe here? And can you fix us up with some papers?"

"Safe as if you were in heaven!" He led them along a narrow hall, past the living quarters. A few feet from the entrance to the shop, Brandon bent down and pulled up a trap door. The old man chuckled delightedly. "Ah, you remember, monsieur! But wait till you see! We have very much improved things since you lay all night under the pile of coal."

At the bottom of the rickety wooden steps, Knight found himself in a storeroom which seemed to contain the junk of the ages. Cibault, evidently feeling safer now that he was below the level of the street, lighted a lamp and beckoned them to follow him. The storeroom opened into another cellar which had in the past been used for coal. Stone stairs led up to another trap door, which presumably gave onto the yard and through which the coal used to be delivered. Cibault pottered over to the farther wall, still chuckling delightedly. In appearance it was just as dirty and solid as the others, but he pressed a spring and a narrow section opened out.

"It was the wine cellar. Do you remember? My nephew, who is a carpenter, made it."

They admired the workmanship and peered inside. A wooden table with uneven legs, one chair, several packing cases, a lamp, a pile of old rugs forming a makeshift bed in one corner and a small printing press in the other.

Brandon explained what they wanted. "I have a set of papers, but I think it would be wise not to use them. I have some reason to suppose they may be on the lookout for whomever is carrying them."

"There is trouble, yes?"

"There is always trouble, my friend," Brandon told him.

"But not with me? Your chief Intelligence man is satisfied with Papa Cibault? Always I take the letters and messages men bring me and always I give them to the man who comes for them." He cocked his head on one side and the rheumy eyes were shrewd. "Always, too, my money comes regularly. So he must be satisfied."

"He's sufficiently satisfied to send you a bonus," Brandon said. "The trouble is not with you. That is why we came. We want one new set of papers and the picture transferred on the other."

"It will not be so difficult." Cibault hauled an ancient watch from the multiplicity of vests he wore and said, "I must waken my daughter to open the shop while I do the work."

AFTER Cibault had gone, Brandon spoke. "I'm going to use you as a clay pigeon, Knight. Hope you don't mind."

"I'm to take the papers you were to have used and go to the Josserand house and see what happens?" Brandon nodded and Knight went on. "You think the leak is among the people who receive or relay information from England?"

"I've got to start looking for it somewhere," Brandon said irritably. "Obviously when the Gestapo were hunting for informers, they'd select the people who could be the most use to them."

"What I didn't gather from the colonel," said Knight, "is how much our people know about their people, and vice versa."

This remark was not a model of lucidity, but Brandon knew what he meant. The underground movement and the British espionage network were separate and distinct, and the amount of cooperation between them varied considerably from time to time.

"Luckily for us in the present situation," he replied, "we know all about their people and they know very little about ours. Cibault, for instance, was forbidden to get himself mixed up with the underground. All Intelligence agents were given the same warning. All except one," he added, "who works for both."

"Who's the exception?"

"A woman." Knight's brain flashed rapidly back to the list Smithshand had given him to memorize. There had been several women. Brandon didn't explain, but went on, "I am not going to be in contact with any of our agents, except Cibault. That was a necessary risk. But I don't want to come here more than I need. I'll get a room at the Grand Hotel."

"And when I get to the Josserand house, I go ahead just as I would if I were you?" demanded Knight.

Brandon nodded. "You may walk straight into a trap," he said and went on slowly, "but I don't think you will be arrested at once."

"Why not, if they knew you were coming and knew you would go to the Josserand house?"

"Because as well as catching Major Brandon, they'd very much like to get hold of the chief of this zone. They never have found out who it is. But they know that I know who he is and it would be reasonable to assume that now I'm here, I'll go to him."

"It might also occur to them to arrest you and try to find out what you know," remarked Knight somewhat dubiously.

Brandon shook his head. "I had a reputation for being a fairly tough customer," he replied matter-of-factly. "I don't think they'd waste their time, at least until they'd quite given up hope of being led to what they want. But if they do arrest you," he went on thoughtfully, "don't get yourself hurt. Make a show of refusing to answer anything for a little and then tell them who you are, and that I sent you with the papers I was to use. You're fifteen years younger than I am and you can point out to them that I was old enough to be in the last war, a fact which they know, so they'll probably believe you."

Knight

The major was silent for a while, then resumed. "If they want to get me, tell them you're supposed to meet me in the Café Austerlitz at eight this evening, or if it's after that, at eleven o'clock tomorrow morning. They'll bring you because they don't know who to look for, and we'll have a chance to get you. But I don't think that will happen."

"They'll just watch me?"

"If they've any brains, and the Gestapo isn't stupid. Once you're sure the Josserand house is watched, leave on some pretext and find out if you're followed. As soon as you are sure that you are, lose the shadow and come back here. But on no account come back here until you're absolutely certain you're no longer followed. D'you understand?"

Knight nodded. There were some

things he'd have liked to have asked, but the return of Cibault prevented him.

"How would you like to be Pierre Desgranges, teacher of mathematics from the *lycée* at Rouen, with a permit to travel to your family in Lille?" asked the old man. "When it came, it had a note attached to say that it was safe for three months." He held out the papers and Brandon studied them carefully.

"I see he's gray-eyed and has dark hair," said the major. "Here are the photos."

While Brandon tried to memorize an amazing amount of material about Pierre Desgranges' background and forebears, family and friends, life and habits, Cibault worked painstakingly and slowly on the identification papers. When he finally professed himself satisfied it would have been hard to tell, even with a magnifying glass, that they had been tampered with.

CHAPTER III

THE TRAP IS SPRUNG

IT WAS mid-afternoon when Knight reached the Josserand house, which was on the edge of the town. He reconnoitered it carefully before he went in. It stood back from the road surrounded by a neat formal garden, one end of which was now marred by a bomb crater. The front drive, he decided, could easily be watched from the windows of either of the two houses opposite, one of which had been badly damaged by bombs and was empty. The back offered no great difficulties to a watcher either. The garden terminated in a thick box hedge which badly needed clipping. The outside toilet stood under a cluster of beeches. A privet hedge and a low wall separated it from the next garden, in which was a tool shed under the drooping boughs of a willow. At the far side of the box hedge were some narrow fields and beyond them the line of poplars that marked the tow-path of the canal. Knight frowned and his mouth set. There was cover here for half the local Gestapo.

He walked openly up the drive to the house, which was large and rambling. The bomb that had disarranged the bed of Sweet Williams had also broken all the windows on that side of the house and a good many of those on the other sides as well.

He had asked Brandon about the Josserand family who, he had gathered, were the nucleus of the local messenger or courier service between England and the underground. The major hadn't been able to supply much information about them. "Josserand is a retired poultry farmer," he had said, "with three daughters, all of whom are married to men who live on their father-in-law."

"Why haven't they been put to work?" Knight had asked.

"Lucien Amiard, who's married to the oldest daughter, has an asthmatic condition. Charles Buisson, married to the second one, is tubercular," Brandon had summed up briefly. "Achille Dupré, married to the youngest, has only one leg. He's suspected of being a pacifist and perhaps a collaborationist."

Josserand made "Monsieur Boutry" welcome and led him into a sitting room fantastically overcrowded with furniture. Knight didn't need the introduction to identify the two men who were seated at a table. The stout one with the bulging eyes and the wheeze had to be Lucien Amiard, just as the tall one with the high color and restless, bright black eyes must be the tubercular Charles Buisson.

"Perhaps now that the major has come—" began Lucien.

"Sh! Imbecile!" exclaimed his father-in-law. "Even in our own house we will keep to 'Monsieur Boutry.' "

Lucien frowned, but obeyed. After all, Papa Josserand paid the bills.

"Shall we send a message to the chief, monsieur," asked Charles, "saying that you want to see him?"

"Not yet," Knight told him.

Lucien glanced at his watch and lumbered to his feet. "It is time I went for the paper."

"Michelette will bring it later," said Charles.

"She is always too late for it." Lucien went on out and Knight could hear him wheezing in the hall.

"So many people asking questions, Monsieur," complained Josserand, "but still the betrayals continue. We hoped that when Monsieur Daudet—"

"Who is Daudet?" interrupted Knight.

"Monsieur St. Paul sent Monsieur Daudet specially from London to find the traitors," explained Charles.

"Daudet will not have got back to London until after you left," said Josserand. "He was not leaving France immediately."

Knight turned the conversation to their ideas about the betrayals. They had little to offer in the way of suggestions, but a number of what were evidently long-standing grievances came to light. "Orders come and we do not know from whom! We do not know why. And we are to obey without question. We must trust those above us, but they do not in turn trust us," grumbled Charles.

"It is safer that way," said Knight, placatingly.

"Perhaps, monsieur," cut in Josserand, "but why should we be treated like errand boys? We are not consulted as to what shall be done. I say we should have more voice in matters."

"And while you were arguing about what should be done," remarked Charles, "the opportunity would be gone. When the war is over, *mon cher beau-père,* we shall send you to the Chamber and you will be able to wrangle to your heart's content. Now is the time for immediate action."

THE door opened and a slip of a girl with a heart-shaped face appeared, hesitated and said, "Papa—"

"I will come, Michelette," said Josserand, a trifle impatiently and went out to her.

So this was the youngest Josserand girl, the one who was married to Achille Dupré about whose loyalty some doubts were entertained.

"As to these betrayals," said Charles after his father-in-law had gone, "if a messenger wanted to sell out, how could he do it? To call a meeting, what do we do? Take a copy of a newspaper and place it in a certain position in some market stall or behind the poor-box in the church. We do not know who comes and sees it. Only the chief of the zone knows that and we do not even know who the chief of this zone is, or where his headquarters are. It is logical to suppose it is somewhere in town, because German headquarters for the defense system of the whole sector from Havre to the Belgium frontier is here. But we do not know."

Which was one of the reasons why the Gestapo had never been able to discover the zone chief, reflected Knight. But he didn't say so. He was about to murmur something soothing when a spasm of coughing suddenly wracked Buisson's frame and, with a handkerchief to his lips muffling his choked excuse, he hurried from the room. Looking out of the window, Knight saw him going to the outhouse under the beeches, his whole body shaken with the coughing. "Poor devil," he muttered to himself and then turned from the window at the sound of an altercation in the hall.

"I suppose this man Boutry, as he calls himself, is another of your saboteur friends."

"And what if he is?" Josserand's voice came in reply with that indefinable note of annoyance which told the listener that this was not a new argument but one that had recurred many times.

"You must be insane!" Short and contemptuous came the words. "How long d'you think it will be before they begin to notice the number of strangers who are always staying in this house?"

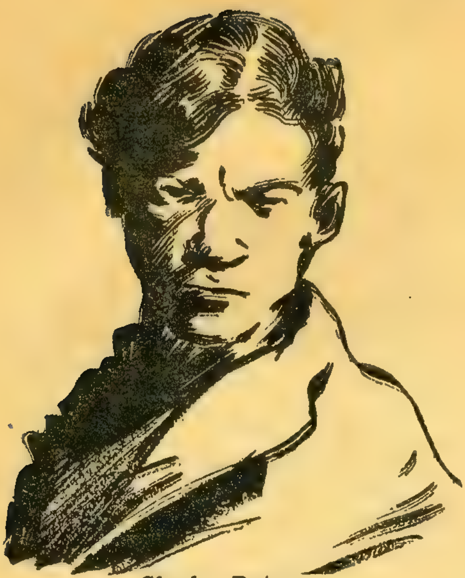
"They haven't discovered it yet and it is a risk I am willing to take." That was Josserand.

"*You* are! So you make your family take it too."

"My family are loyal."

"Your family wouldn't eat if it left this house." Again the younger voice was harsh and contemptuous. "Who will suffer for your heroism, *mon beau-père?* Who will pay for the risks you are so willing to take? Not you, most likely. But your wife. Your children. Michelette."

Knight went to the door which was open a crack and peered out. Opposite Josserand was a tall, fair, nervous-look-



Charles Buisson

ing man leaning heavily on a stick—Achille Dupré. Knight went back to his seat as Josserand's angry voice said, "Michelette is not a coward. She knows the risks and accepts them."

"Michelette is a child living in a fairy-story world. How can she grasp the folly of a handful of untrained men fighting an army and the insanity of a group of amateur plotters trying to outwit the best secret police in the world!"

"Michelette is loyal."

"Loyal! To whom? To what?"

"To France."

"France will be here regardless of who wins the war." The younger man laughed cynically. "Whoever tries to rule Europe will need France."

"Thank God, most Frenchmen aren't traitors!"

"Meaning that I am because I tell you the truth?" Again the cynical laugh. "You don't know what people think or say outside your own fanatical little group. You're so blinded with your hatred, you don't think straight."

"That I should have a German-lover in my house!"

"I don't love or hate them. They're a nuisance with their rules and regulations, with their endless questions and prohibitions. But at least if we obey them, we may get a little peace and quiet."

"Peace and quiet! Is that all you want?" The contempt was in Josserand's voice now. "And you call yourself a man! What of freedom?"

"I am free," answered the younger man softly. "I will always be free. None can touch what I think or what I believe. Neither man nor government, conqueror not tyrant."

"Bah! You make me sick! You had better be careful. German-lovers are not popular. Seven who were suspected of giving them information have been shot within the last month."

"I am not an informer."

A disbelieving snort was the only answer and uneven footsteps retreated down the passage.

JOSSERAND returned to the room but he had hardly seated himself before the sound of the front door brought them uneasily alert. Then Charles' voice in the passage saying, "Did you get the paper? You were very quick."

"I saw Father Constantine." Breathless and wheezing, Lucien followed Charles in, his bulging eyes darting a glance at Knight which the latter couldn't interpret. "Tissier has been arrested," he announced.

"Tissier!" Josserand and Charles repeated it together and turned immediately to look at Knight.

"When?" demanded Charles.

"Last night. This morning, rather. Shortly after that plane came down on the Duquesne farm. A patrol had surrounded Tissier's field and after the plane crash, they took him and his wife and the two children away."

"What time did you leave Tissier?" Josserand turned to the American.

"I didn't see him," he answered with perfect truth. "I landed in a field a few hundred meters from the canal."

"But it was arranged—" began Charles.

"Too many people knew it was arranged," answered Knight calmly. "The arrest of Tissier seems to point that fact."

"Did you know there would be a patrol waiting?" demanded Lucien unpleasantly.

"Of course not," answered Knight impatiently, "but as I was sent over to investigate treachery, it stood to reason that I expected treachery, anywhere and everywhere."

"You have a good deal to explain, monsieur," said Josserand pompously.

"The Gestapo have been aware of every move you people have made recently," said Knight. "I wasn't going to take any chances of walking into a trap at Tissier's field and, as I remarked before, his arrest proved I was right."

"I think we should send word to the chief that we want to bring this man to him," suggested Charles. "I think that he—" Another spasm of coughing interrupted him. When he'd recovered a little, he gasped out the end of his sentence. "I think he can probably identify him."

"Major Brandon set up the organization in this district," agreed Lucien, "so the chief must know him!"

"That's why he didn't want to go to the chief!" exclaimed Charles.

"Then he's an imposter," said Lucien slowly.

"They learned that Major Brandon was coming," was Charles' theory. "They were waiting for the plane and shot it down. Meanwhile, this man was ready to impersonate him."

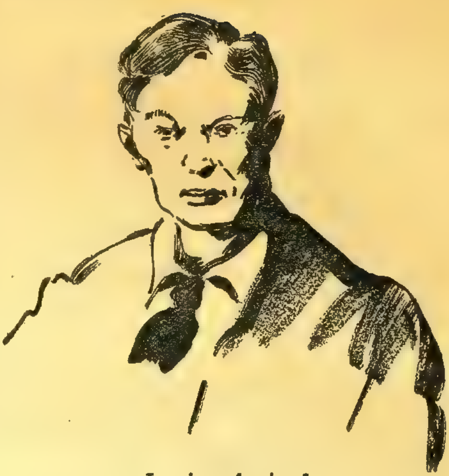
"It would be a good way to learn about an organization," said Josserand slowly. "Gain our confidence as a man sent by the British, question us, pretending to discover traitors, and learn all our secrets."

"You're making up a lot of nonsense without a shred of proof," snapped Knight. This absurd waste of time irritated him, but an hour later he realized that it was something worse than irritating. It was dangerous. The knowledge that they were surrounded by treachery had imbued these people with a suspiciousness that needed no evidence.

"We should send word to the chief and demand a trial," said Charles.

"Don't we know how to deal with traitors without sending word to the chief?" demanded Lucien. "Are we children that we must ask the chief's permission before we act?"

"The rule is that five men shall judge a traitor," put in Josserand.


Lucien Amiard

"It isn't difficult to send for two of the others."

Knight had a sensation of unreality. They were raising their monstrous tower of suspicion on such fantastically slender grounds.

He hadn't parachuted into Tissier's field; Tissier had been arrested; the plane had been shot down; Knight refused to say where he was during the intervening hours. Therefore he was a Gestapo agent. It would have been funny if it hadn't been so serious.

Charles was talking again. "But I think we should send word to the chief first. He might have instructions about him."

"You will ask for instructions before you blow your nose soon," Lucien said contemptuously.

"I will send Michelette to summon two of the men." Josserand apparently had reached a decision. "Watch him well, Lucien."

LUCIEN crossed over to the wall on the righthand side of the fireplace and took a gun, equipped with what appeared to be a home-made silencer, from a neatly concealed panel. They had made up their minds that he was a spy, thought Knight, and no matter what he told them now, they would not believe him. Perhaps the two men whom Michelette had been sent to fetch would have more open minds, but he doubted it. His every instinct told him to make a break for it, but Lucien was playing lovingly with the gun and, meeting his bulging eyes, Knight knew that he would seize any excuse to use it.

"D'you know whom I saw going into Notre Dame de Secours as I talked to Father Constantine?" asked Lucien. "The Santrieul slut. I wonder she dares show her face in a church."

"Perhaps she's repenting of her sins after the beating you gave her," suggested Charles.

"We don't like traitors, monsieur, either male or female." Lucien turned back to Knight and his voice had a note of complacency in it. "This woman appears in a café that is patronized by German officers. Colonel Ehrwahlt is her lover. So one dark November night, about twenty of us took her into the woods and beat her."

"It's nothing to be particularly proud of, Lucien," said Charles unexpectedly.

"Jealous because you weren't there? You see," he turned back to Knight, "it was a raw night and Charles has to be careful of his chest. So he missed the show. And what a show! We made her sing for us, too. It was a good lesson to any girls who had been living with their soldiers. The next day several of them left town in a hurry."

"But your victim didn't," observed Knight.

"She's shameless. But the next time she won't get off with a few months in a hospital. It will be eternity in the graveyard," announced Lucien.

"What did she ever do to you? Turn down your advances?" said Knight, goaded into speech by his disgust at Lucien's tale.

Lucien snarled and launched himself towards Knight but the opening of the door checked him. Achille Dupré limped into the room, took in the scene and laughed. "The conspirators at play."

"It amuses you," snapped Lucien.

"It is rather funny. Either you're fighting among yourselves about authority or prestige or else you're suspecting each other. Ah, this is what I was looking for." Achille picked up a thin book from the table and eased himself into a chair, his pale face twisting with pain as he did so. Medicine has progressed a long way in devising artificial limbs but the brace that is necessary for a leg blown off at the hip still hurts.

Charles glanced at the book over his shoulder. "Pindar," he snorted in disgust.

Lucien looked at his watch. "I wonder what has happened to Michelette?"

"*You* wonder!" A faint bitter laugh underlined Achille's words. "It did not occur to you to go yourself!"

"Papa Josserand sent her because she is less likely to be suspected," replied Charles. "I don't think we need worry about her," he went on. "She has probably gone somewhere else as well."

"She wouldn't—" began Lucien nervously.

"Télémaque's house isn't far out of the way," suggested Charles meaningfully.

"I hope Michelette does go to see Télémaque," Achille answered steadily, his eyes veiled. "It will be good for her to get away from the atmosphere of this house."

"You should have been a Communist, Achille," sneered Lucien. "They share their wives, I'm told."

The situation was strained and relief came in the form of Madame Josserand's frantic voice from the passage. "*Mon Dieu,* we are lost! Sainte Vierge, what can we do? Sainte Thérèse, help us now!"

THE door flew open so that it crashed back against the wall and Josserand rushed in. "The Gestapo are watching the house! There is a man in the window of the bombed house opposite. You led them here!"

"He is one of them! Spy! Murderer!" Madame Josserand advanced across the room and hit Knight squarely on the mouth. Her hard hand, gnarled from a lifetime of work, and the brawny muscled arm were no joke. "What are you waiting for?" She looked around the room. "Are you not men?"

"Men, or wild beasts still in the jungle," murmured Achille.

"Take your Greek poetry and get out. We don't want weaklings!" Lucien hauled Achille from his chair and shoved him, limping unsteadily, from the room, the slim volume of poems still in his hand.

Josserand had stepped forward to restrain his warlike spouse. Knight had made no move to defend himself. He didn't like the way the situation was developing and the least little thing might precipitate disaster. "You might wait till you have some evidence before you judge a fellow," he said mildly.

"Wait until your Gestapo friends come and take us all?" snorted Josserand. "D'you think we're fools?"

"If the plan was for him to get into our confidence," said Charles thoughtfully, "the Gestapo will not raid the house. They will wait for him to communicate with them."

"He's right." Lucien agreed with his brother-in-law. "And as soon as it's dark, we must slip out and evade them. Our only chance is to get away before they get tired of waiting for him, or suspect that something has happened to him, and search the place."

A little later, two dour-faced men arrived, whose names Knight never learned. They held a low-voiced conversation in the hall with Josserand, then came in silently and took seats at a table that Charles had cleared. Lucien took upon himself the task of prosecutor. He summed up the case against Knight and when he'd finished, asked, "Have you anything to say in your defense?"

"To begin with, I never represented myself as Major Brandon. I said I was a British officer sent to find the traitors, which is true," he began.

"You are using the papers the major was to have used," persisted Lucien.

"Yes." Knight was beginning to feel uneasy; there was nothing for it but to tell them. He did, ending, "All this was in order to give the major himself greater freedom."

"Do you expect us to believe that? I suppose it was also to give the major greater freedom that you betrayed Tissier and brought the Gestapo here?"

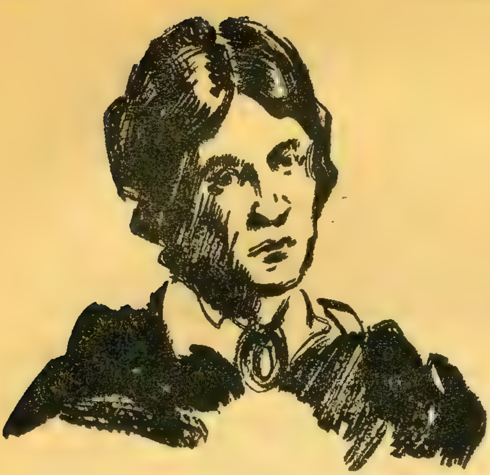
"I had nothing to do with Tissier's arrest," said Knight impatiently. "And I know I wasn't followed here, by the police or anyone else."

"You wouldn't need to be followed," put in Lucien. "You could have told them to come here."

Knight talked. He argued. He demanded that the zone chief be notified, but as he looked into the faces around him he knew he was wasting his time. The vote was unanimous.

"It won't be dark for another half hour. You have until then," Josserand told him. "Would you like a cigarette?"

DON'T BE CHEEKY, MISTER!
WHY NOT? I SHAVE WITH STAR BLADES!
6NX PROCESS
STAR
DOUBLE EDGE
4 for 10¢
STAR
SINGLE EDGE



Mama Josserand

"I'll smoke one of my own," Knight replied shortly. He was more angry than frightened. The utter futility of getting killed by these dolts stuck in his throat. One of the men he didn't know was sitting near the door, an automatic in his hand. Lucien still had his gun. It would be suicide to make a break for it, but it looked equally suicidal to remain. A hunch stronger than reason made him cling to the belief that Brandon would get him out.

Charles started to cough. The spasm grew worse and, handkerchief over his mouth, he again left the room hurriedly. Knight's eyes flicked to the clock. Ten minutes of his half hour was gone already. It was rapidly growing dark outside.

CHAPTER IV

ARNAUDET TELLS A STORY

MAURICE ARNAUDET was a plumbing contractor. He had a store on the corner of the old market place and the Rue St. Michel which led down to the bridge over the canal. He was a widower, with a married daughter living in Indo-China and a son a prisoner of war. He was a very thin little old man and, looking at him, it was hard to picture him as a husband and father. He had a desiccated quality of age that bore no relation to decay and ultimate death. As with a mummy, you felt that ten or twenty years hence there would be no change. And truth to tell, there had been very little change in Maurice Arnaudet during the average memory. But for all that, he felt his years.

"I'm getting old, Major Brandon," he said as he sat at the desk which occupied nearly all the small office at the back of the shop. "And an old man gets tired. You, who are sent first here and then there, can be given a leave in between. But we who are fixed, there is no rest for us."

Brandon refrained from saying that though he *could* be given a leave between jobs, he hadn't been since before the war began, unless three months spent in a hospital could be counted as furlough. He listened for some time to Arnaudet's troubles and the difficulties he was encountering and made one or two suggestions. Brandon believed in letting people get off their chests all they wanted to, in listening to their complaints, problems and grouches and, where possible, getting everything straightened out before beginning to talk about what he had come to say. "If a man has something on his mind that he wants to tell you, he isn't giving his full attention to what you're saying," he would explain.

When he thought that Arnaudet had accomplished a complete catharsis, he said, "What d'you know about these leaks?"

The weariness in the wrinkled old face deepened. "No matter what we do, they continue." A little later he explained, "You see, all our people are amateurs. There is emotion, and not reason, with amateurs. And then there is fear. Fear grows. It is cumulative. After a while some men become so afraid that they betray themselves. Then with others, when nothing happens to them for a month or a year perhaps, they grow careless." Brandon nodded attentively but said nothing; he knew it all so well. "There are also those who start with a great surge of emotion. They would die for France! Yes, but when they find that France does not want them to die for her, but to keep on doing tedious, unpleasant work, day after day, year after year, they grow bored.

“The Gestapo is shrewd, too. They seek out those who are afraid to lose their jobs and they say, ‘Of course, if you were of service to us, your job would be safe. Otherwise—’ At first they only tell something harmless to insure their job, but later it is different.”

The old plumber sat and looked at the inkwell as if in the almost dry pot he could see the weaknesses and follies of human nature which, though they interested him, caused him no surprise. Suddenly he looked up and spoke in the tone of one who hopes he will be contradicted. “It seems to me as if it were not just one or two who are giving information, but as if the Gestapo had several clever counter-espionage agents in our ranks. Daudet thought the same thing, so he told Télémaque Bordages.”

“Daudet?”

“The man St. Paul sent to investigate.” Arnaudet replied.

“It would have been cooperative if he’d told me,” Brandon said sarcastically. “Still, I’m getting used to that. We’re usually so busy trying to beat our allies, we’ve hardly time for the enemy.”

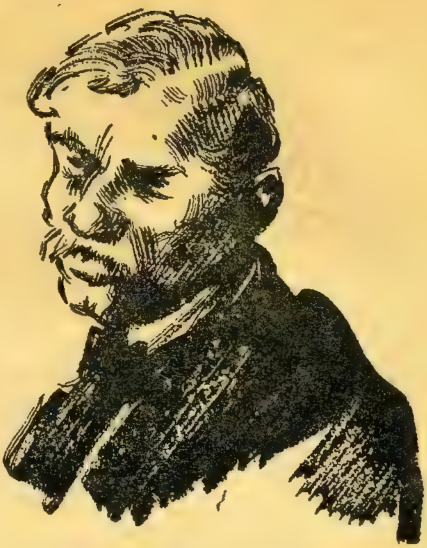
“If they have got counter-espionage agents in,” said Arnaudet wearily, “they are pretty high up.”

“And they seldom waste time with unimportant matters,” added Brandon. A little later, he said, “I may need some men in a hurry at the Café Austerlitz.” Briefly he explained enough of what he had arranged with Knight for the old man to understand the situation. “I want the boy protected as much as possible. By the way, who is this Télémaque Bordages who is in charge of communications with England?”

“Télémaque is an engineer at the power plant. He’s a good man.”

“He replaced Jaudon?” queried Brandon.

“Yes. Jaudon was shot, you know. Télémaque obtained control of a number of Jaudon’s barges, at his death. It is useful to continue having a man with natural connections with the canal barges and also one who can obtain electrical equipment.”



Papa Josserand

BRANDON nodded but didn’t answer. Arnaudet was studying his dark face through the wise, bright eyes that had seen so much of humanity and seldom been baffled. But this Britisher was a man he didn’t know. In spite of the months they had worked together, setting up the organization three years ago, the dangers they had shared, he didn’t know him. He didn’t think he ever would. He was a machine, efficient, ruthless and apparently soulless. Like machines, only something purely physical could deter him from his path. But you never quite knew. There had been the woman.

A great deal of Arnaudet’s value as the district chief stemmed from his instinctive ability to understand men, to probe their weaknesses, to predict how they would react in given circumstances. Because he usually could make a fairly confident prediction, he felt remarkably bewildered in the rare cases where he couldn’t. He was bewildered now. There was something he wanted to say and he didn’t know how to go about it. He started obliquely. “A new man has been sent to help Gestapo Captain Brundt here. They want to stamp out the brains of the sabotage ring and, during the past month there has been a lot of pressure brought to bear from higher up to do the job quickly and efficiently."

"I wonder if they've got wind of anything," muttered Brandon.

Arnaudet shrugged his shoulders. "They are always more nervous at this time of year. The regulations concerning the prohibited coastal belt are more rigidly enforced; it is more difficult to obtain permits to travel anywhere within fifty miles of the sea. This man they have sent has been two years in Norway. I had thought that he could be stopped. But it would be a bad job to bungle, so I thought it better to leave it alone."

"How did you find out?"

"Andrée Santrieul." Arnaudet said it matter-of-factly and waited. There had been no visible reaction. The major might have been considering the advisability of liquidating the new Gestapo captain or wondering whether it would rain tomorrow. Finally Arnaudet said, "Have you seen her?"

"No."

Just the single word. Still he was getting no help. Then, when he was trying to think of another approach, Brandon said, "Say whatever it is you want to say."

"It is difficult to find the words."

"You always seemed to me to have a remarkable command of your own language as well as several others," retorted the Britisher.

"I do not know what you have heard."

"Never mind what I have heard. Say what you want to say."

"When you left us," began the old man, his eyes on a patch of the wall that needed a new coat of whitewash, "Andrée was singing in the café. Her performance was risqué, but that was all. The officers demanded that it should be more so . . . you understand, monsieur? She is very beautiful and so many of them fell in love with her. One needs a protector if one is to continue in a job like that. For nearly a year now, it has been the commandant, Colonel Ehrwahlt. This is all generally known in the town and it has made trouble for her."

"What kind of trouble?"

Arnaudet didn't look at him. The voice told him nothing. Still scrutinizing the wall, he went on, "Some men went one night to her flat and took her to the outskirts of the town. They stripped her and beat her and might well have killed her but a patrol came by. She was taken to the military hospital where Colonel Ehrwahlt ordered a day and night guard over her. It was nearly four months before the scars were healed and she was back at the café. She has not been really well ever since, monsieur, and several times recently she has told me that she thought they were beginning to suspect her. Not the colonel, you understand, but the Gestapo. I wanted you to hear this from me," he ended simply.

"Thank you." Still the voice told him nothing and still he didn't turn. "Who were the men?"

"There were some twenty, I believe. Men of the town."

"I said, who were they?"

Arnaudet turned at last, almost as if he were afraid. "It would be an insane risk to try to—" he began, and stopped.

"Who were they?" repeated Brandon.

The old man made a gesture of helplessness. "They say Lucien Amiard was the ringleader." He named several others. "But that is all hearsay, monsieur."

THERE was a silence which he made no attempt to break. Brandon's mind had gone back more than three years, to Paris. Poland had fallen and the advancing hordes were sweeping inexorably forward, but Paris still felt safe behind the Maginot Line. He was leaving the city early the next morning and it had been after midnight when he went to Andrée Santrieul's apartment to say good-by. Neither knew if they would ever see the other again. He had felt curiously isolated, as if the two of them were standing alone in the center of a crumbling continent.

"Will you marry me?" he had asked. "Now, before I go."

"We can't," she had told him.

"A priest—"

"I doubt if it could be done." She looked at the clock. "We have only four hours. We can't afford to waste them."

He had tried desperately hard to be fair. He knew the odds were against his being alive at the end of it. His lips close against hers, he had told her that.

"I know," she had whispered.

"You won't regret? You're sure?"

"If we don't take this moment that we have, we'll both regret it—always."

It had been as simple as that.

At five o'clock he had left, knowing in the bitter moment before departure that even as the steady tramp of the Teuton legions into Poland a month before had marked the end of an era, so this night had marked the end of his personal world. Whatever the future might bring of good or bad, it would never again be the world he had known; the wave of violence had put a punctuation point to everything that had been. He didn't expect to survive; he had faced that long before. Any time he had, be it years, months or only days, was an interim, borrowed time. Values changed; he no longer reckoned in terms of a personal future. He had no future and he didn't much mind. Looking down into Andrée's face, seeking to fix every lineament in his mind, he had read the same knowledge of finality in her eyes. She, too, was facing the fact that this was not *au revoir* but good-by.

And when, amid the chaos of France's retreat in 1940, they had met again, it had been as if some impish gods had handed them an unexpected dividend, only to snatch it back in taxes. They had known a fierce happiness, underlined with pain, as they had spent their dividend with prodigal hands before the tax collector should come. And now they would meet once more.

But there was no indication of these thoughts in the major's dark features and half closed eyes and when he spoke again it was to give some general instructions. "When we know how Knight gets along, and whether he's followed or not, we may get some kind of lead. I've got to take short cuts and cut corners, Arnaudet. There's so little time."

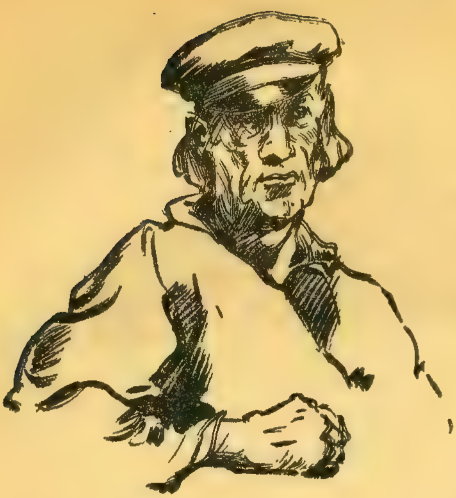
The cracked, old-fashioned bell of the private entrance at the side rang, and with an anxious glance at the Britisher, the old man went over to the window and peered round the edge of the blackout curtain, which he had already drawn although it was not yet quite dark. "Télémaque Bordages," he said. "Something must have gone wrong or he would not come here now. Wait here."

Brandon sat perfectly still in the little office. Deliberately he kept his mind off the story Arnaudet had told him. He made himself think of the task he had come to accomplish. He would be glad of an opportunity to see Télémaque Bordages, for Télémaque, in charge of communications with London, was in a position to betray them. Not that there was the slightest evidence that he had, but at least he had opportunity and that was the first requisite. There was a hurried conversation outside in the shop, then Arnaudet returned, followed by a tall, fair-haired man with a build and head that reminded Brandon of the illustrations of Greek gods in *Smith's Classical Dictionary*. The handsome features were drawn into lines of perplexed anxiety now and harassed blue eyes scanned the Britisher with the apprehension with which all men engaged in underground activities regard strangers.

"Repeat your story, Télémaque, as you told me," said Arnaudet.

"MICHELETTE DUPRÉ stopped at my house to speak to my aunt." A very slight flush darkened the young man's fair skin. "She told me that she had just been to fetch the two Boulanger brothers to make the five men necessary for the trial of a traitor. She was upset, you understand, monsieur. I asked who it was and what evidence there was against him, for there have been many trials and shootings lately and still the betrayals go on. She told me that a man had come called Monsieur Boutry, representing himself to be the Major Brandon who is expected from England, and that he is an imposter. Her father and Lucien had decided that he should be tried immediately and sent her with a message to the Boulangers. On her way home she stopped in to see my aunt," he added again.

"The infernal fools," muttered Brandon.



Arnaudet

"Michelette also thinks the house is being watched, for she was followed when she left it. She says she lost the man who was following her by doubling back behind the old waterworks."

"Your men are out of hand, Arnaudet," Brandon said rather sharply. "There should be no trials without authority from you. Send word immediately to the Josserands that Knight is known to you."

"Télémaque, go at once. Make the best time you can or you may be too late."

Télémaque stood up, obedient but a little bewildered. Brandon, who had been watching him thoughtfully, got up also. He had reached a decision. "I'm Brandon," he said, and turned back to Arnaudet. "The fact that the Josserand house is being watched has told us things we wanted to know. I'm going with Bordages. I'll be in touch with you later."

As they started through the fast gathering dusk in the direction of the Josserand house, Télémaque was at first silent.

In spite of three grim years' experience of underground work, he was getting a youthful thrill from meeting the almost legendary English major, who had reputedly been the brains that had set up the organization, who had been now here and now there, under a dozen different names, and only known to one or two people. Now he had not only met the major, but the major had trusted him with the knowledge of his identity. It made up for a lot of dull, tedious work.

"What's the layout of the Josserand house and garden?" Brandon asked suddenly.

Télémaque described them, clearly and concisely.

"If you were the Gestapo, where would you watch it from?" demanded Brandon when he had finished.

"The front from the empty house that has been bombed and the back from one of the little sheds in the neighboring gardens," he answered promptly.

"Right. So would I from your description." Brandon paused a moment. He was evolving a plan. "Can we approach the place from the back?"

"Over the vegetable gardens from the tow-path." Télémaque broke off and stared at a figure that was limping painfully along with the aid of a stick. "Achille Dupré. I wonder what he's up to."

"You suspect him?"

"No," answered Télémaque slowly, "he is a dreamer, not a traitor, I think."

"We'll take the tow-path and vegetable garden," said Brandon. He was acutely conscious of the pressure of time. They were passing the little church of Notre Dame de Secours. "How late does the church stay open?" he asked.

"All night now." Télémaque seemed surprised at the irrelevance of the question as he cut sharply to the right, down a small lane that led to the tow-path. "The crypt is used as a shelter if there's a raid." A few minutes later, he turned off the tow-path and started across a strip of beetroots. "You see the dark hedge ahead? That's the box hedge at the bottom of Josserand's garden."

"Do you usually go in the front?"

"Yes."

"You will do as you usually do. Deliver your message and tell Knight to leave by the back door, across the garden and through this hedge. Don't mention me, unless you have to."

Télémaque shook his head. "I often relay messages from the chief. They know that and expect it. What they don't know is that I know him."

"Just as well," replied Brandon drily. They had reached the dark mass of the box hedge now and the twilight was fading into a dull gloom.

"They will follow him if they are watching," Télémaque said tentatively.

"I'll take care of that. You deliver your message and then leave the house as quickly as you can."

THE remained in the shadow of the thick hedge, watching the powerful figure of the younger man disappear through a lane two gardens away. By standing almost in the hedge, he was reasonably sure he was unobserved and, by peering through, he could see the tool shed in the next garden and the outhouse in the Josserand one. A man was making his way back from the toilet to the house, dabbing at his lips with a handkerchief. A hard cough floated down to the bottom of the garden.

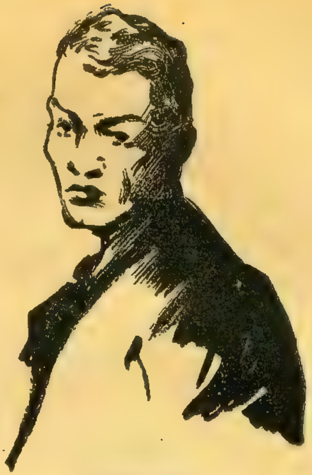
Brandon remained motionless. Was it already too late? He kept his eyes on the dark patch, under a pergola for rambler roses, that he knew was the kitchen door.

At last it swung open and a figure emerged, seeking the cover of the trees as it cut across the garden to the hedge. Brandon breathed a painful sigh of relief. He moved along the hedge to the point where it was evident Knight was heading for and, regardless of sharp twigs that stuck into his neck and face, almost wedged himself in the thick bushes.

"Knight, cut straight across to the tow-path. Turn right. Take the first lane you come to. It'll bring you to a church. Go in and wait for me."

The younger man's face was white and strained. He said, "The place is being watched."

"I know. Don't waste time. Go on." Already Brandon's eyes were scanning the two nearby gardens.



Télémaque

Knight had hardly started across the beetroots when a slight noise some distance behind him made Brandon turn. Coming through the less sturdy hedge of the garden next door was a man in a mackintosh. He stood perfectly still for a few minutes, then began to come towards Brandon, keeping close in to the hedge. The Britisher waited. The Gestapo man paid little attention to the hedge. His eyes were glued to the hurrying figure of Knight, who disappeared up the lane on the right. He increased his pace. It was unfortunate for him that the barking of a dog made him turn his head so that he looked almost directly into Brandon's face. Otherwise he would have got off with a blow on the back of his head. Before he could give the shout that his mouth was already opening to emit, an arm somehow circled his neck, the hand across his mouth. He felt the scratch of a knife on his throat and no more.

Brandon let the body slide down to the ground at his feet. For some minutes longer he stood waiting. Not a sound stirred in the gardens on either side. Without any appearance of haste, he went in the direction that Knight had taken.

The light in the shabby-looking church of Notre Dame de Secours was dim. A gleam from a sanctuary lamp fell on Knight's reddish hair; he was kneeling in the last row of chairs, far over to the side. Brandon entered quietly and knelt beside him.

"What happened?"

Briefly Knight told him. "They must

be insane," he ended. "They hadn't a shred of evidence against me and their trial was a farce."

Brandon nodded but made no comment.

"I'm afraid it's spoiled your plan," Knight whispered after a while, "my telling them I wasn't you."

"We've found out what we wanted to know. Gestapo were watching the house and you were followed when you left."

"Then—" The younger man's body tautened and instinctively he glanced round to the door.

"I said you *were* followed. You aren't now. But those Boutry papers aren't any use any more. Go back to Cibault and have him fix you up with others. Then go and get a room at the Grand Hotel. Try to get number twenty-four. It's next to mine and was vacant. There's a connecting door that might be useful. Say you want a quiet room at the back. . . . I'm going to the Café Persan. Andrée Santrieul may be able to help us."

"Andrée Santrieul! But she's—" stammered Knight.

"She's the one person I told you worked for both British Intelligence and Arnaudet."

"Then her—er—friendliness with the Germans is just camouflage?"

"Only Arnaudet and I know that." Brandon got to his feet and Knight followed suit. The screaming of the siren on a Gestapo truck halted them at the door. Brandon opened it a crack and peered out. "*Schutzstaffel,*" he murmured, "and I'll bet they're going to the Josserand house."

"If there's a telephone, perhaps we have time to warn them," suggested Knight.

Brandon looked at him with faint surprise. "Télémaque Bordages will have left the house by now and the others aren't worth bothering about. Besides, there's no phone here."

The younger man didn't argue. It wasn't his business and, in spite of a feeling that he should make some attempt to warn them, he couldn't bring himself to feel any degree of distress at the prospect of Lucien and company in the hands of the German secret police.

"We'd better not go out together," Brandon was saying.

CHAPTER V

REUNION AT THE CAFÉ PERSAN

"STRANGER at my table, Monsieur Monou." A one-eyed waiter had shoved his way through the crowded Café Persan to the side of the proprietor. Monsieur Monou, a greasy ball of fat who was called locally "the Turk," although he claimed to be French and had a passport to prove it, looked across the heads of his customers, of whom at least ninety per cent were German officers, to a table by the far wall. There was nothing alarming in the appearance of the dark, tired, somewhat bored-looking man who had just sat down.

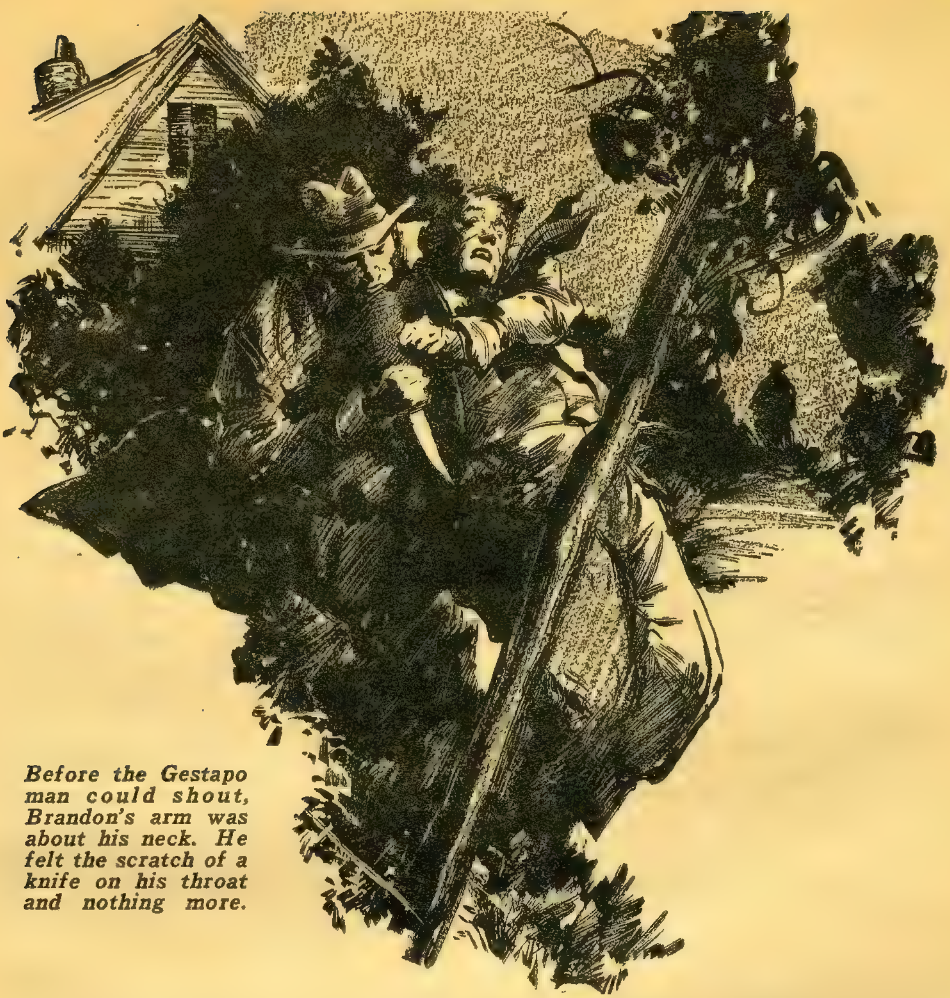
"Did he say anything?" inquired Monsieur Monou.

"Asked if there were any cognac. Said he was willing to pay for it. Asked when Mademoiselle Santrieul would sing."

"Oh. He asked that, did he?"

"He is a Parisian, by his accent," added the waiter.

The proprietor dismissed him and considered the newcomer. Monsieur Monou was always wary of anyone about whom he knew nothing. He was able to keep his café open because he had struck a bargain with the Gestapo as soon as they had arrived on the heels of the surging German army. A café, he had told them, was a wonderful place for hearing things and he knew where to find girls. He would relay to them any information he picked up and provide girls if they would let him remain open. They had let him remain open and he had provided girls, but the first part of his bargain had been harder to fulfill, for within a week the townspeople had ceased coming to his café. The only local people who came were the town quislings and one didn't learn anything useful to the Gestapo from them. He threaded his way across to the table by the wall. Brandon, who had watched the waiter go over and report to him, looked up indifferently.



Before the Gestapo man could shout, Brandon's arm was about his neck. He felt the scratch of a knife on his throat and nothing more.

"You are a stranger here, monsieur?"

"You are the proprietor? Allow me to congratulate you on your business," replied Brandon.

"Soldiers need relaxation, monsieur. Someone recommended my little café to you, perhaps? Perhaps you have heard of my star, *la belle* Andrée?"

The waiter returned with a bottle of brandy which would have been rejected by a Paris taxi-driver. This was unfortunate because the stranger looked at it and, naturally, didn't answer Monsieur Monou's last question.

"Can't you do better than that? Surely the German army drinks something less poisonous."

"Get a bottle from my own cellar! What do you mean serving monsieur with such swill? I am sorry," he went on, as the man retreated, "but they have no sense. One must take what one can get in the way of help these days."

A very sad looking magician was finishing his act. It was quite well received, more for the rather obscene patter than for his hoary magic tricks.

"Now you will see *la belle* Andrée," said Monou.

As he spoke, a woman came out onto the tiny stage. She flung a mass of copper hair back from her forehead and moved forward with an oddly detached insolence. Reckless green eyes looked over the heads of the audience with the same curious quality of detachment that was in her movements. She was clad in diaphanous black chiffon which set off the pale, clear skin. A light behind her silhouetted the slender body. She started to sing in a vibrant, husky voice.

The waiter returned with another bottle which he placed on the table. Monsieur Monou washed his hands with invisible soap and beamed. "May I?" He seated himself without waiting for the permission to be granted. "I always watch *la belle* Andrée every performance, no matter how busy I am."

"Don't you listen to her as well?" inquired Brandon, as he poured himself a drink. It had the desired effect. The proprietor was silent until the song ended.

"Is she not beautiful, monsieur?" he asked the moment the last note had died away.

"Very. You are lucky to have her here."

Monsieur Monou knew that. He sometimes wondered at his good fortune, and also wondered just why his star was there. She had been an actress at the outbreak of war and had played in Paris in the productions of outstanding authors. Why should she be willing to stay here and entertain a bunch of half drunk enemy officers? Yes, Monsieur Monou sometimes wondered, but he kept his thoughts to himself.

MADEMOISELLE SANTRIEUL was starting her second number. She moved slowly round the microscopic dance floor, a spotlight following her, and avoided adroitly the hands that reached out from the tables. She managed to give the illusion that she was unaware of the hands, even while she was skillfully evading them.

As she neared them, Monou took his eyes momentarily from his star and looked at the stranger. Brandon was lighting another cigarette. He held his hands cupped round the flame and it threw a triangle of light onto his dark face. Suddenly Monou thought of the devil. Though previously his personal conception of the devil had had black eyes, for the future, in his mental picture the gentleman would be equipped with gray ones. He turned back to the contemplation of his star.

She was beginning the last number now. The men strained forward, impatiently and eagerly. This was what they were waiting for. The verse ended and with an incredibly swift movement she discarded the top part of the chiffon garment.

Alone among the uniformed crowd, whose hungry eyes were devouring the dancer's form in the fierce glare of the lights, the stranger seemed unmoved. He was writing something. The violinist handed Andrée Santrieul a filmy green wrap. Throwing it round her, she walked off the stage.

Brandon waited till the applause had finally died away. "Will you have someone take this to Mademoiselle Santrieul?" he asked.

Monou looked at the folded slip of paper.

"Monsieur is wasting his time."

"That is a privilege we still enjoy," retorted Brandon.

"Now if monsieur would just take my advice, there is a little girl who came only yesterday. She—"

"Just send the note to Mademoiselle Santrieul."

Brandon watched the fat figure make its way through the crowd with surprising skill and ease. Monou would read the note before he delivered it. He was meant to. It simply said, "Do you remember Pierre Desgranges? I have never forgotten those delightful days in Paris when you were playing in *Le Rire Farouche*. May I come to your dressing room?"

She had seen him; that he knew. And for the rest, he was not letting himself think or feel.

The one-eyed waiter was returning. "If monsieur will come this way." He looked surprised.

Brandon paid for his drinks, gave the man his tip and followed him across the floor, through a curtain that had once had a Persian scene painted on it, into a tiny passage. Andrée Santrieul was standing in her dressing room doorway, facing half a dozen young officers.

"Not tonight," she was saying. "My voice is tired. I am tired. Last night I sang you German songs half the night, so that this morning I didn't think I'd have a voice at all. Some other time."

A young lieutenant who was leaning

against the other side of the door laid a hand on the green ostrich feathers at the neck of her wrap, tugged at it.

"Naughty! Naughty! Only in the show," she reproved him. Before he knew what was happening, two soldiers who were standing on guard stepped forward and lifted him aside bodily.

At the same instant Brandon met her eyes. For a second she was motionless, the she slipped the wrap back into place, nodded to the two soldiers and called out, "Pierre Desgranges! It is good to see you! Come in."

She looked at the young men around her. "Run along and try to behave yourselves! Pierre Desgranges is an old friend and I want to talk to him." To the guards she said, "I don't want to be disturbed," and continued as Brandon entered, "I've never forgotten the fun we had in Paris, but who would think of your being here?" Then she closed the door and leaned against it.

A swift glance round the little room assured him that it was empty. He held out his arms and she stumbled to him. He didn't speak but held her very close.

Her face pressed hard against his coat.

At last she broke away. "Why have you come?"

HE looked to the door and she read his thought. "They won't let anyone in, except the colonel. And he always knocks. Colonel Ehrwahlt has good manners," she added bitterly.

Seen closely, the clear pallor of her skin was almost transparent, the line from the high cheekbones to the jaw too fine-drawn; dark smudges, carefully covered with make-up, shadowed the green eyes. "I got your letter from Saigon," she said. "The one that was smuggled in to Arnaudet. It took months, but it came. You must have been crazy."

"You were the one who was crazy, Andrée," he said gently. "To write that there could be nothing between us any more. My dear, don't you know that there is nothing that has happened, or can happen, that will alter things between us?"

She went over to a chair by the dressing table and sat down. "Did you enjoy the performance?" she asked, her voice harsh and strained.

"Andrée, I love you." He stood behind her, his hands on her shoulders, looking at her in the mirror. "We do what we must. Both of us. The rest is all that matters." His hands felt the ridge of a scar under the wrap. Very gently he drew it from her shoulders.

"No—no!" It was almost a moan. She stood up abruptly and the movement jerked the wrap down. From shoulder to hips the white back was marred by a hideous network of scars. The look on Brandon's face was not good to see as he regarded them.

"I was beautiful and I wanted you to remember me like that."

"That doesn't matter, either," he said. He turned her to him and kissed her.

The whine of a siren signaled an alert and less than a second later an anti-aircraft battery somewhere on the perimeter of the town went into action.

"The colonel won't come until the raid is over," she whispered.

The *crump* of a bomb punctuated the night and the lights went out.

"They were insane to send you here," she said, minutes later. "The Gestapo would give half a division to get their hands on you."

"There is so little time, and I knew the structure of this organization, the district, the people." He explained the urgency. "The traitors must be rooted out, every last one of them. There must be absolutely no risk of a leak when I give these instructions. Otherwise it would be better not to give them."

The wail of a siren signaled the all-clear.

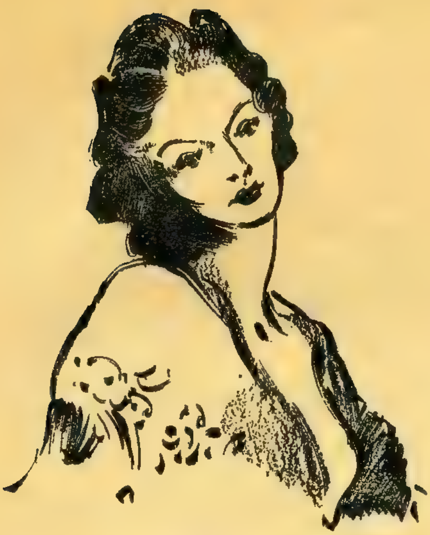
"St. Paul sent a man over to try and find the leak," she told him. "He won't have got back yet."

"Arnaudet told me."

"Arnaudet had Télémaque send him here and I talked to him."

"Here! But you—" He stopped, then said, "Arnaudet shouldn't have done that."

"Télémaque doesn't know anything about me. I mean, he just told Daudet



Andrée

to come here and I sent a waiter and said I'd like to talk to him. Daudet was bristling with authority and he did represent the government I serve, you know."

"I hope Daudet isn't picked up and made to talk. He might implicate you. Still, it's done now."

"The top Gestapo man here, Captain Brundt, suspects me already. I've known that for some time. So far he has no proof, and he'd need proof before Colonel Ehrwahlt would let him touch me. But once he had proof—"

There was a knock on the door.

"Who is it?" she called out.

"Joachim," answered a man.

"The colonel," she whispered, then called, "But of course, come in."

The bulk of Colonel Ehrwahlt loomed in the doorway. "Are you all right, Andrée?"

"Of course, Joachim." She went to him and held up her face to be kissed, running on smoothly, "I want you to meet an old friend of mine, Pierre Desgranges. Colonel Ehrwahlt."

Even by the flickering candlelight, the German's rather handsome Prussian features seemed drawn and tired and his eyes looked harassed. He said, "All the power lines are down and the water supply is cut again," as he sank wearily into a corner of the couch. "I'll have to go back to my office in a few minutes. I only came to take you home. You're not dressed yet."

"I'd just started to talk to Pierre when the raid began and the lights went out," she told him. "I won't be more than a minute."

"I'll go, then." Brandon stood up.

"I'm glad you came, monsieur. It is good for Andrée to have an old friend to talk to." Ehrwahlt spoke graciously. "Most of your countrymen treat anyone who is civil to us as a pariah."

"I plan to be here for a couple of days." Brandon turned back to Andrée. "I hope I may see you again."

"Of course. You've no idea how I've enjoyed talking over the Paris days. They seem so far away sometimes." She held out her hand with the right blend of carelessness and friendliness.

"I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again, monsieur, I trust," said the colonel formally.

CHAPTER VI

THE GESTAPO STRIKES

FRANK KNIGHT sat on an uncomfortable chair in room twenty-four of the Grand Hotel, watching the corridor through a slit of door that he had open. His face wore a worried frown as he shifted his weight in the vain endeavor to discover some angle at which he could sit without finding a piece of chair sticking into him. He was hungry. It had not seemed advisable to try to obtain a meal during the raid and, mindful of what he knew of the local food situation, he had refused old Papa Cibault's offer of supper when he had been there. He was also cold. The windows of the room had been broken long ago, but the recent raid had dislodged a coping which in its turn had dislodged the shutters which had previously kept the wind out. Now it seemed to be whistling through with the ferocity of a half gale, encouraged by the open door and some equally wrecked windows at the farther end of the passage. As he huddled deeper into his coat, Knight corrected the metaphor in his thoughts; like a whole gale.

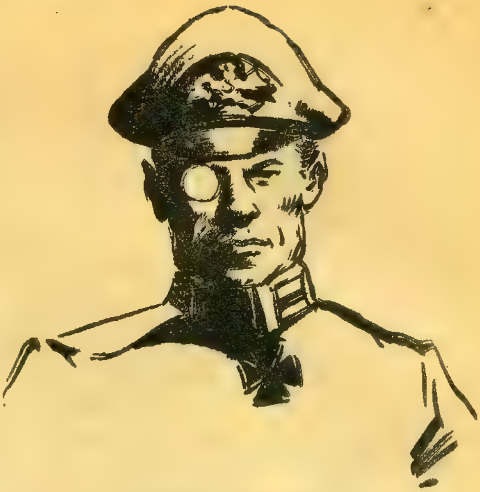
He had learned several things since he had left Brandon a few hours before, all of them disquieting, and he wanted to pass them on to the major with the least possible delay. While Cibault had still been laboring over his new identity papers, in the name of Noyer, a neighbor had come and talked with the old man's daughter. With the incredible speed with which news spreads among people denied a free press or radio, the rumor was already all over town that everyone in the Josserand house had been arrested, and that other arrests were in progress.

From Cibault's, Knight had ambled along the Avenue de la Victoire towards the New Free Library, which had been the pride of the town, until the Gestapo had ordered the books removed so that they could establish their headquarters there.

A knot of men and women, their faces worn and dull with misery, were gathered outside. There were always little knots like this, silent and tragic-eyed, anxiously scanning the bulletin board, trying to catch a stray word that might tell them of the fate of some loved one, or peering with ghastly eagerness at the faces of the sullen groups of people who were hustled out of trucks and herded in.

Knight had joined the group, quiet and blank-faced like the others. An elderly woman whose work-gnarled hands held a patched shawl over her head had been standing motionless a little to the side of him. Her eyes were fixed with peculiar intensity on a spot some half a meter above the bulletin board and her lips moved silently, as if in prayer. Then, still without a sound, she crumpled and lay in a pathetic, ungainly sprawl in the dim light. The others looked stupidly at her for a moment, then two women separated themselves from the group and came over. One of them propped her up. After a long time, her eyes opened and they were fixed now on the steps into the headquarters.

She struggled to her feet, pushing aside the women who tried to help her. "My son is coming now. I must be at the steps to meet him." The woman argued with her and finally managed to bundle her off.


Colonel Ehrwahlt

"A little box containing her son's ashes was delivered to her a month ago," a man of about his own age said to Knight harshly.

"And still she does not believe," murmured Knight.

"Is not the human race strange, monsieur?" went on the man. "Less than half a kilometer away is a canal. The water is deep, the current strong. Yet they go on suffering."

"You are a student of human nature, monsieur?"

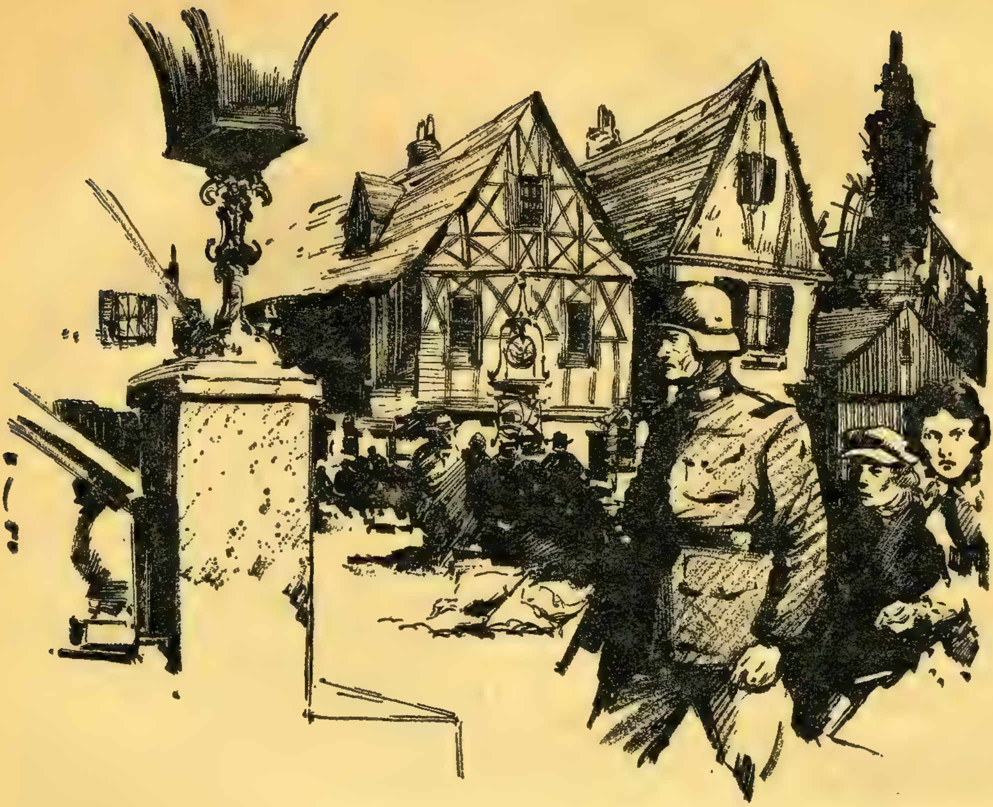
"I was a reporter," replied the other bitterly.

A rumble of trucks over uneven cobbles roused the group from its deadly apathy. People turned in the direction from which the noise came.

Two sleek cars drove up first and a horde of uniformed figures sprang out, hurrying up the steps between the guards. The trucks were grinding to a halt now and no one had eyes for the officers.

Some twenty men and women, several scarcely more than children, were hauled down and herded in. One or two bore marks of violence, as if they had put up a fight, but for the most part they were dazed and silent.

The man who had said he had been a reporter reeled off names. "Dupin and his wife. And that's his eldest daughter.



Fabray. *La veuve* Morand." As each little huddled bunch was driven up the steps, he muttered a name. At last the end was reached. He turned away. "That will be all tonight. They have enough victims for their sport." For a second he looked at the knot of spectators melting away in the dark and shook his head sadly. "It is beyond reason! *Bonsoir, monsieur.*"

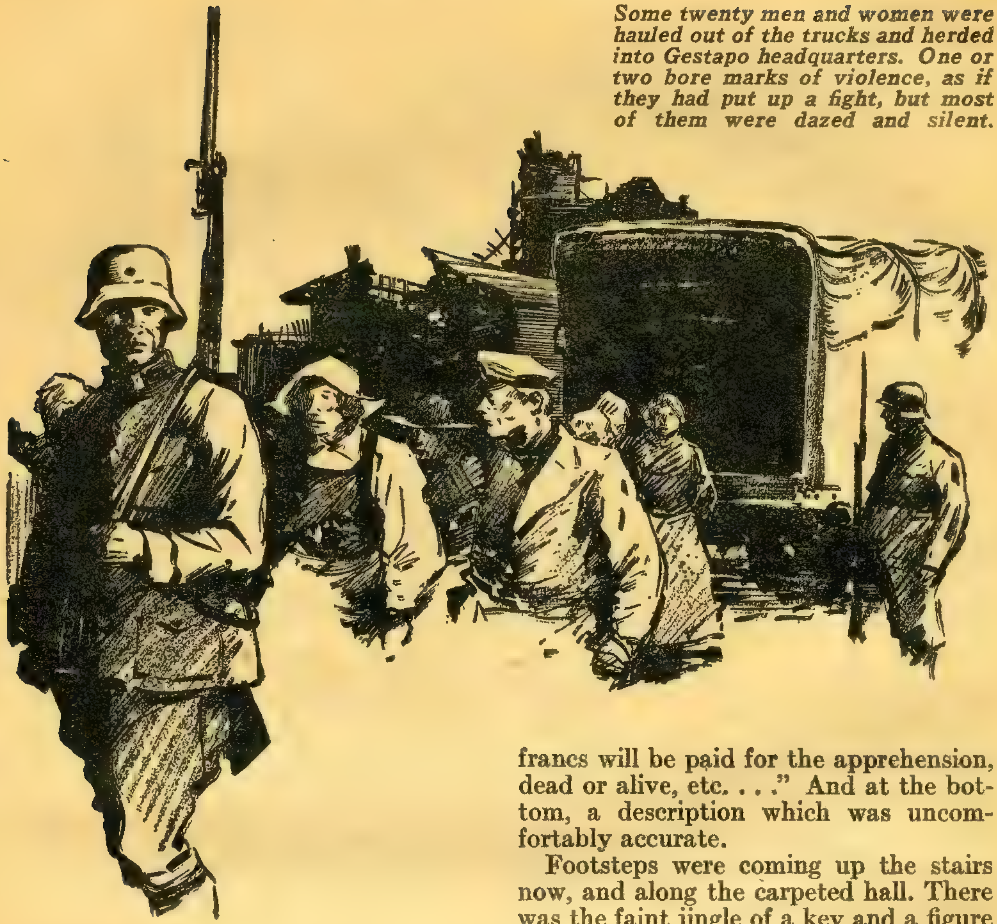
THE was gone and Knight found himself almost alone. Not wishing to be conspicuous, he turned his footsteps in the direction of the hotel. As he crossed the square towards it, the siren wailed the alert. The elderly clerk was frank about rooms.

"Now I have one on the fourth floor," he had announced, "but part of the roof was blown off in one of the raids. It has not been possible to have it mended. This part of the roof is not directly over the room of which I speak, but it has caused the ceiling to collapse partially and at times other parts of it fall in. Then I have another room; this one is on the first floor." Knight had pricked up his ears. "Unfortunately it is a back room, but if monsieur would not mind. . . ."

"I want a quiet room," he had told the clerk.

"But I must tell monsieur that during the last raid a bomb fell some distance away—really quite some distance—but it weakened the outer wall and the pipes burst. We have tried to mend them ourselves, but monsieur will understand, we are not plumbers. So when there is a raid or too heavy concussion from trucks passing on any of the neighboring streets, the pipes sometimes break again and the water comes in to room twenty-four. So monsieur can choose."

"I think twenty-four and the waterworks sound preferable to the possibility



Some twenty men and women were hauled out of the trucks and herded into Gestapo headquarters. One or two bore marks of violence, as if they had put up a fight, but most of them were dazed and silent.

of having the remainder of the roof on my head."

The clerk had handed him a key and Knight had gone up the stairs to the room with the unreliable pipe. For three hours he had been seated on this uncomfortable chair, watching through his crack of door.

As the time dragged heavily in the darkened room, Knight's frown deepened and his blue eyes grew more anxious.

The most immediate cause of his anxiety was a public notice which had evidently been posted behind the desk downstairs only shortly before he had arrived. He had read it while the clerk was explaining the drawbacks of the rooms. "Reward! 50,000 Francs. For the English spy, Michael Brandon. 50,000 francs will be paid for the apprehension, dead or alive, etc. . . ." And at the bottom, a description which was uncomfortably accurate.

Footsteps were coming up the stairs now, and along the carpeted hall. There was the faint jingle of a key and a figure loomed into the semi-light of the corridor. A wave of relief swept over the watcher. He clicked his fingers as Brandon went by and for a second the head turned in his direction and gave a barely perceptible nod.

Knight closed the door softly and went and unlocked his side of the communicating door. A minute later he heard a bolt slide along on the other side. He pushed through into a room very similar to his own, save that the casualty seemed to have been in the corner of the floor near the outer wall which sloped down at a distressingly acute angle.

Brandon had his back to him. He was opening the suitcase he had brought from Cibault's and examining the order in which he had left the things. He said, "Sit down," but didn't turn.

"There's a reward notice out for you," began Knight.

"I saw it."

"That means someone's talked or why would they bring it out now? And who?" He stopped for a second and, getting no reply, went on. "Everybody in the Josserand house was arrested tonight." He told him all the names that the reporter had given him of those brought to police headquarters. "It's wholesale," he ended. "What the devil can we do?"

"I'd half expected it."

"But, good God, sir, if you'd expected it, why—" Knight broke off. There was an indefinable tension about the older man that made Knight hesitate to question him.

"People whom the Gestapo suspect or know belong to the organization, and who are being watched, are as much a danger to us as spies or traitors," explained Brandon carefully, in the manner of a professor expounding a dry but necessary point. "Unless we could obtain the files of the police, and I see no possibility of doing that, the only way to discover who those people are, is to let them be arrested when there is a general round-up. Your complete disappearance from the ken of the men detailed to watch you provided the impetus for a general round-up."

Knight nodded. He felt a little sick. Those women and youngsters. And the others he hadn't seen—the children left in empty homes.

"All those names you've just given me were in the lists St. Paul and Rodopin had in London," Brandon continued.

"It does look as if the leak were somewhere in the lines of communication. But if it is there, or in the courier service which centers round the Josserand family, why would they all be arrested?"

"They'll probably release a good many of these people after questioning them and among those released will be their spy. If they didn't arrest him or her, it would be noticeable. People would wonder, then suspect, and his usefulness would be over."

KNIGHT nodded again. Probably by morning, half to three-quarters of them would be released. Released and watched by the Gestapo.

"Télémaque Bordages wasn't among those arrested?" asked Brandon after a while.

"This fellow who talked to me didn't mention his name."

The major flipped the suitcase shut and sat on the side of the bed. "At least this hasn't been searched since I went out."

"But that description of you," said Knight anxiously. "Height and weight, black hair and gray eyes."

"There are lots of black-haired men of five feet eleven," answered the other, "and lots of them have gray eyes. But there's one interesting point about that description. It's quite accurate. Only three people here know me, and that description was furnished by someone who had seen me."

"And the three people are Arnaudet, Cibault and Andrée Santrieul," said Knight slowly. "What about Télémaque Bordages?"

"I think that notice was printed and ready. Télémaque would hardly have had time." He paused. "There's Rodopin or St. Paul or someone in St. Paul's office. They had a description of me from Smithshand to make my papers. There's also the possibility that they've got a spy into Smithshand's bureau."

"And if they've got one as far up as that, they probably know about—" Knight left the sentence unfinished. Even though they had searched the room for any kind of microphone, it was safer not even to speak of that.

"We'd better get some sleep or we won't be much use for anything," said the major.

Knight turned to the door. Hand on the knob, he stopped. "D'you trust Andrée Santrieul?" he asked. "I know she's been useful, but she's—"

"Don't forget that so far there have been no leaks in Intelligence and Andrée works for them too. Why should she betray one and not the other?"

"That's true. I don't know her, of course, but she sounds a bit—"

"Before you discuss her," interrupted Brandon without any particular emphasis or expression in his voice, "you should know that she is the woman I hope to marry one day."

"Good God!" Knight stared and gulped, felt himself going red, and fell back on military formality. "Yes, sir. Well, good night, sir. I hope you sleep well." Feeling ridiculous and awkward, he started through the door. Brandon's voice stopped him. There was a faint, tired amusement in it.

"Have you ever killed a man, Knight?"

"Yes."

"In the course of war?"

"Good God, yes! I mean, I'm not a murderer."

"Exactly. If there'd been no war, you'd probably have gone all your life without killing anyone. Good night."

Although he was dog-tired, Knight found it difficult to get to sleep. He was disturbed partly because of his own gaucheness, though he could not be blamed for it, but mostly by the discovery of a human facet of his superior.

Tramping feet in the passage brought his thoughts away from his own tactlessness. They had stopped outside the next door. There was a peremptory knocking. The door was opened quickly and the knocking stopped. Knight knelt down and applied his ear to the connecting door, but could hear nothing. Some five minutes passed and he heard the feet again. He risked opening his other door a crack and peered out. Gestapo! And they were taking Brandon with them.

(End of Part 1)

"RILEY GRANNAN'S LAST ADVENTURE"

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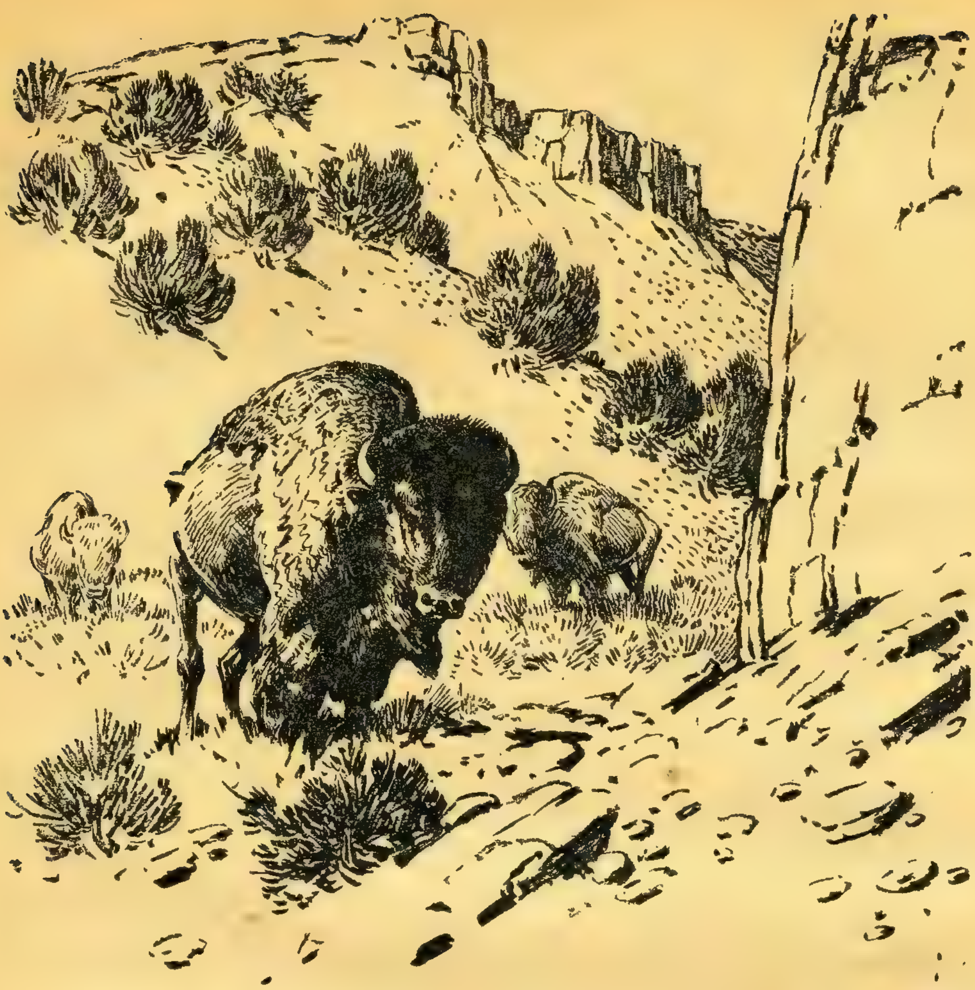


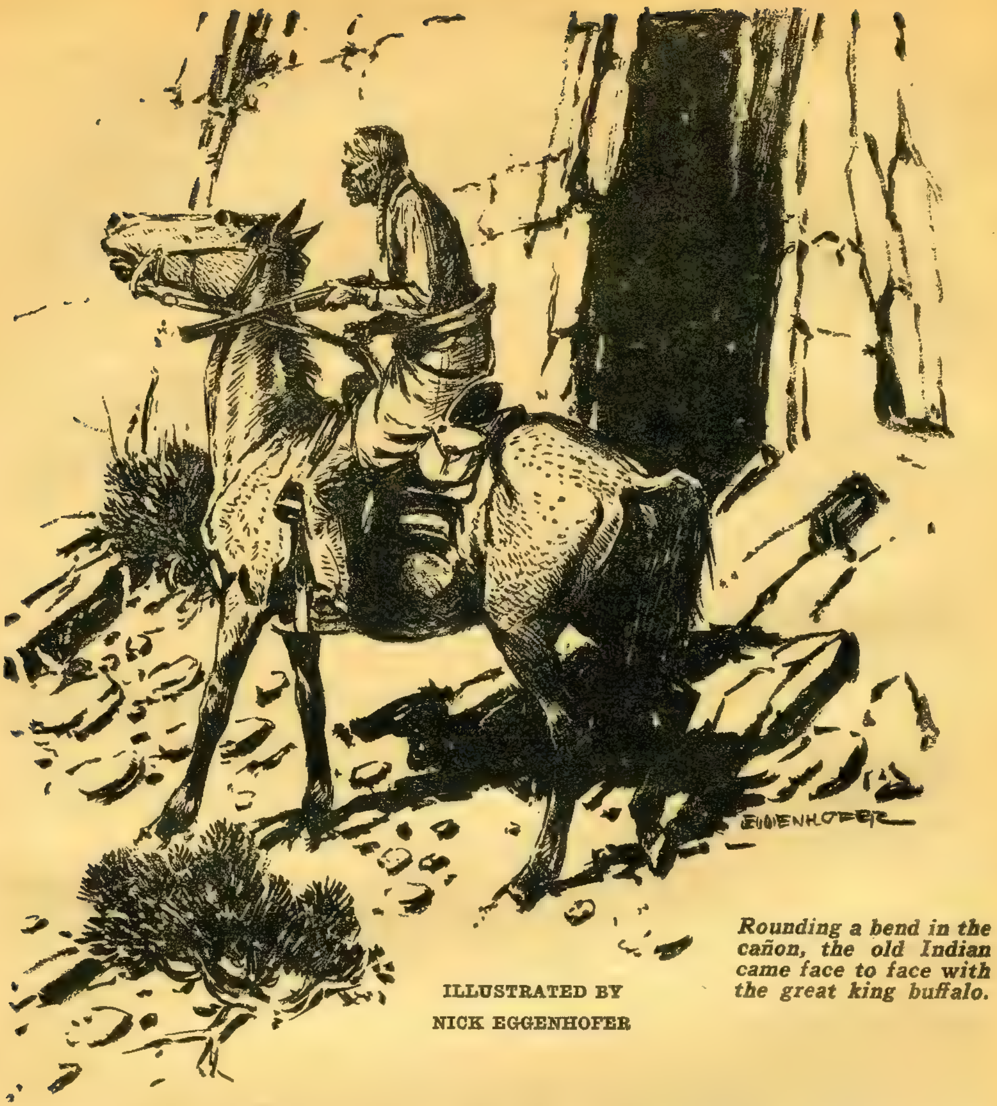
BUFFALO MAGIC

By

PAUL ANNIXTER

ALL this came about after some rich Kiowas had made a friendly visit to Taos Pueblo, where they were invited to join in a gift dance. They came up through Santa Fe in three big cars and were the guests of the Taos for two nights and days. On the final afternoon the young Taos dancers had joined the Kiowas in a friendship dance and the fine voices of the Taos singers had blended with the visitors' in the old Kiowas songs. The Taos are the songmakers of the pueblo peoples and some of their old singers had made a special song for the occasion. When the dancing was over, gifts were brought forth and every Kiowa, even the women and young girls, received a present.

The Taos are a hospitable folk, but they are poor. They make neither



Rounding a bend in the cañon, the old Indian came face to face with the great king buffalo.

ILLUSTRATED BY

NICK EGGENHOFER

blankets nor pottery and never a winter passes but there is some suffering and privation in their pueblo. The wealthy Kiowas were soft from good living. Although they lived in tepees most of the year out of choice, they had their big houses and fine cars, their large incomes from oil lands. They were deeply touched and somewhat embarrassed by the meagerness of the Taos' gifts—small trinkets, rawhide quirts, ribbons and pieces of trade cloth. But the gifts of the Taos came from the heart and on the final night the friendship of the two tribes was cemented over a feast at the governor's house.

On the journey home the Kiowas talked long over the poverty of their northern friends, discussing what suitable gift might be sent back to show their good feeling. It was old Abel Brybone, of the Buffalo clan, who finally suggested shipping some live buffalo to the Taos, both cows and bulls, so that the animals might multiply in time to a sizable herd which would ever remind the Taos of their brothers in the south. In Texas a few protected herds of buffalo still lived in a half wild state, but on the high New Mexico plateaus it had been nearly sixty years since a live buffalo had been seen. The last wild herd had been rounded up and slaughtered on the slopes of Mount Wheeler as far back as 1889 by the Taos and Jicarilla Apaches. However, all the pueblo tribes still had their Buffalo clans and dances.

Abel Brybone's idea met with approval and after much deliberation nine buffalo, including two bulls and a calf, were purchased by the Kiowas and sent north in a convoy of seven big trucks. The cows of the little band were the ordinary runty specimens seen in parks and zoos. Of the two bulls the younger one was quite ordinary, only a little over five feet in height. He was just reaching his prime and could in natural course be depended upon to increase the numbers of the band. But the other bull was altogether a phenomenal creature—one of the very last giants of his specie left alive. These great king bulls were as different from the ordinary tame-bred bison as a grizzly is different from a black bear. The days of this one were numbered; it was a touch of poetic pride that caused the Kiowas to include him in the shipment.

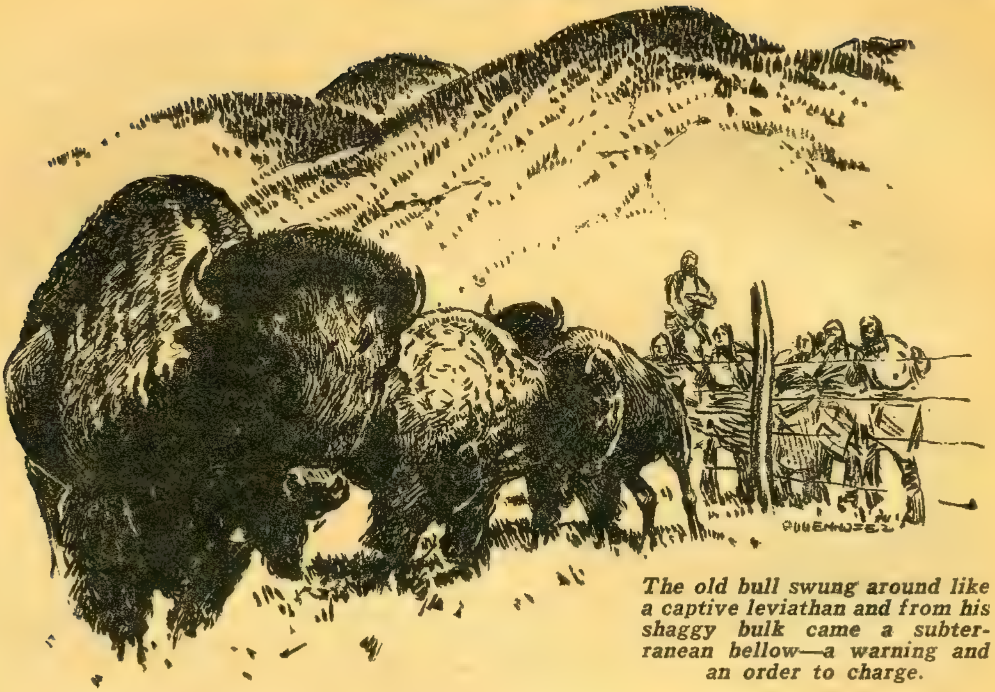
The big bull's sire and mother had been part of the historic Last Thousand, the last regiment of buffalo left alive on the western plains, which Sitting Bull, the Sioux, in his anger at the greed and wantonness of the white men, rounded up with his tribe, commanding that they be slain without regard to age or physical condition. Thus the white hunters who had exterminated close to fifty million buffalo during five bloody years, should at least not have the pleasure of slaying the last of the red man's game. The big bull's mother had been one of the handful of animals to escape into the Bad Lands just before the final massacre. Big Bull had been born during her subsequent flight into Montana and nineteen years later he had been part of the small herd which the Government, awakening tardily to the fact that the greatest of American game was almost extinct, had rounded up and given protection in one of the great national parks.

FIVE feet eleven inches he stood at the shoulder hump, and he was ten feet long from muzzle to tail—a remarkable size even for the old days of the Continental herd. His rear parts sloped abruptly away from the massive shoulders to comparatively small hindquarters and this, combined with his tawny hue and black-tufted tail, gave him a decidedly leonine look. His coat had gone straw-colored like all old buffalo's, except for his head and his shaggy frontlet which were almost black. The coarse dark hair on his forelegs flapped at every step he took.

Ancient he was and of another world and age; there was something Pan-like and elemental in the vastness of him and in the way the matted tangle of his hair seemed striving to hide a wild Dionysian light in his rolling eye and the flaring black nostrils. Silenus' own black beard hung down to within a few inches of the ground; and beneath the surface, the hint of a more than animal sadness, the unspoken supplication of all passing things.

He had seen great change in his forty-two years. In his calfhood he had seen long lines of U. S. cavalry troops winding over the dun plains and heard the sound of far battles. He had seen some of the pageant of western migration and the rapid spread of white settlements over the plains. Some of these he had wandered through with his band, after they had been deserted and had fallen into ghost camps and rubbish heaps. He had seen the Sioux, the Dakotas and the Cheyennes go forth in war parties to fight the whites and to make war upon each other; for he was a patriarch. He was almost as old now as a buffalo might be.

Time was when he had been the mightiest bull on the western plains, over two thousand pounds of sheer power, the ingrained strength of a healthy tooth in every fiber of him. He had been a great monarch in his day, greater than any of the master bulls of the old times. Not because he had been king of countless numbers—his following had been numbered by scores instead of thousands—but because he had ruled in the terrible years of transition, when only super-cunning made a king. During that period the nature of the great bison had had to change from dull, stupid trust in numbers into utmost craftiness in order to survive.



The old bull swung around like a captive leviathan and from his shaggy bulk came a subterranean bellow—a warning and an order to charge.

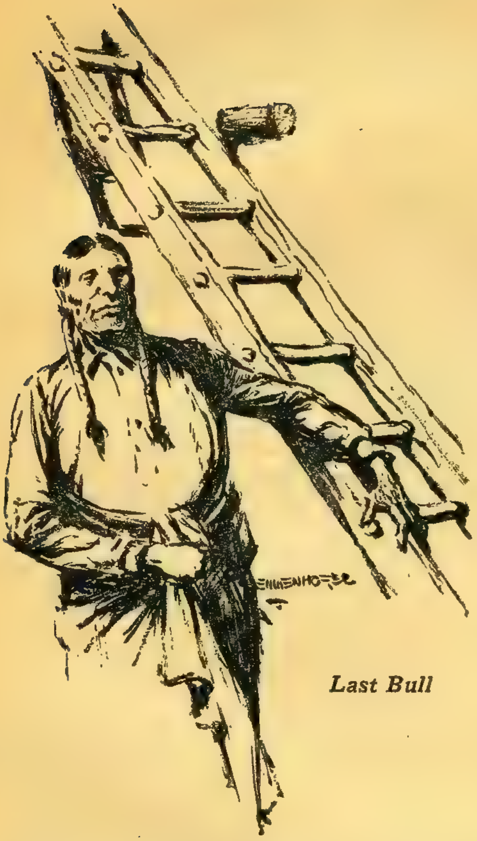
Many and many a trap and ruse of the white hide-hunters had he escaped. But what he had not been able to escape was the inevitable toll of the years. This, too, he was resisting mightily, as an old king should, but slowly his great strength was giving way to weight and his muscles were often stiff and sore. He lived in a fog of memory which rarely lifted now, in which past and present were intermingled, and though his head was still unbent, his eyes were dim and had taken to playing him tricks.

On the trek north, during which the nine beasts were crowded into big crated trucks, he lived in a blur of pain, fatigue and memory; the motor passage became a flight of his old-time band into new country where they would be safe for a time from harrying hunters. His crate was so small he could not lower his bulk down to rest. The pain of his stiffened legs became the pain of long travel-rack; the young cow buffalo squeezed in beside him was often his mate of thirty years before; and the dark clumps of the piñons that furred the rolling hills became the vague ranks of other buffalo—part of his scattered herd that moved about him.

When the three-day convoy ended, the big bull had fallen into a torpor. He had to be prodded sharply to drive him down the steep board incline. He had not been asleep, merely out on his feet, sunk fathoms deep in a daze as heavy as hibernation.

Now the Taos had been notified some time before of the coming of the buffalo, but the cold written word had made little impression upon the elders of the tribe. The bit of paper was passed from hand to hand, but until this hour few had had an actual belief in the miracle. Hence they had made no preparation for the arrival and the buffalo were unloaded into the horse pasture north of the pueblo, while half the tribe crowded round to watch.

As the pasture gate was being wired up again, the old bull abruptly came to from his dull drift of exhaustion. He blew mightily through great black nostrils with sudden gargantuan rage and twin puffs of dust rose from between his forefeet. Vaguely he recognized men about him and all at once it seemed to him that he had been caught napping, that hunters had crept up on his band while he dozed. He swung around like a



Last Bull

captive leviathan and from his shaggy bulk came a subterranean bellow—a warning and an order to charge. The other bull held his ground indifferently, but two of the more nervous cows forgot all the precedents of a lifetime and answered the injunction. The three of them thundered down the length of the corral in a haze of dust.

At the end, a stout wire fence barred their way, but it is doubtful if they even knew it was there. They ripped through it as if it were so much twine and pounded on into the piñon-clad hills beyond.

THIS Spanish name was Juan Pina. Old John Pina, the whites around Taos called him. But his Indian names were more fitting, more apt in nomenclature. Swift Arrow he had been named in his youth, for he was an ardent hunter. That name had been changed during the famine winter of '91 when alone he had ridden forth and returned with the meat and hide of a lame bull buffalo, winter-caught among the high hills, lashed upon his horse. His medicine had led him to the game, he claimed. Last Bull he had been called from that day on, for that hunt was like a miracle, and that buffalo was the last ever to be seen in the Sangre de Cristo foothills.

No one who did not know his history would have believed he was eighty-five years old. He still carried himself with unbent pride and his eyes, though dim, were still level and defiant, with the glint of black tourmaline. There was an aloof dignity in his dark graven features that contracted something in the pit of the stomach of most white tourists he looked at. For he lived in the past and his face was a carven record of the grim old days, and the equally grim spirit behind it bridged the span of years with an almost physical impact that made white men aware of the weak soft spots in their civilized fiber.

So the tourists would recoil at his gaze and take it out by turning to laugh. For the old man lived in great poverty and dressed like a scarecrow. He made his own moccasins and kept his hair braided and bound; but for the rest, patches of flesh were usually showing through holes in his faded jeans and his cheap cotton blanket was of the indistinguishable hue of sand. But ragged as he was, his reputation was still great and his word carried weight in council.

In his young prime, Last Bull had been war chief. Later he had been governor. Later still he had been *cacique,* or soothsayer of the tribe, an office of high honor and importance. He was really unofficial *cacique* still, for those of the elders who wished to learn of the hidden side of things came secretly to Last Bull for knowledge, instead of to Wind Singer, who was official *cacique.*

When his wife had died some years before and his only son had been killed, the old man had gone into mourning, losing all interest in material things. His few horses and other belongings had melted quickly away in trade, and finally his grandson was forced to take pity on his poverty. A small adobe room was built for him in the rear of the grandson's dwelling, unconnected with the house. In this windowless cubicle he existed, wearing ragged cast-off garments, living on the odds and ends of food that came his way. Here, too, he meditated, talked with other old men and held his chants and ceremonies, for he was still great in medicine. He still preserved the old medicine bundle he had used forty years before and was ever welcome in the *kivas.*

His grandson was an educated school Indian who drove a car, wore his hair short and effected white men's garments. His wife, a San Juan girl, had also been to Albuquerque Indian school. She wore silk stockings and high-heeled shoes and had been trained as a housemaid. They tried to outdo even the Mexicans in taking on white ways. Neither of them joined in the tribal ceremonies any more. They had broken away from the old Indian ways, though they could not quite bring themselves to break away from the pueblo itself. In their blood was still a mute fear of the old gods.

Most of the younger Indians of the tribe looked upon Last Bull as a burden and a nuisance, though often enough they were awed at seeing some of the most powerful elders of the tribe going in and out of the old man's room—the War Chief; Agapito the Medicine Man; old Roan Horse himself, who with the historic Standing Buffalo, had led the Taos fighters on that terrible day long ago when the Mexicans had betrayed them, leaving the Indians to meet the artillery advance of General Crocker's army. That day and for days thereafter, Taos valley had run red with blood. Last Bull had been there, a very young man just beginning to be a warrior.

Often he and Roan Horse talked of the old days when the Taos had still been men; when they dared not have doors or windows in the pueblo, for fear of raiding Apaches, and had to enter their homes through the roof. Now the tribe was falling into decay; the pueblo was a breeding ground of continual trouble between the old and the young. The communal solidarity that had lasted since the beginning of time was shattering under the influence of the whites. The nature of the whites was hard, like stone; they could resist their own disruption. But the nature of the Indian was soft like the earth; perishable as a ripe pear which begins to decay at the first skin bruise.

THE older he became the more Last Bull sank into the past, till the things of the present were but troublesome shades. All that he saw heightened this condition. Three-quarters of the younger element seemed to be breaking away from the old ways of the tribe. Scores of the young men had the habit of standing idly about town all day, weary with new unknown desires, restive under the burn of cheated youth only half conscious of its loss; hiding a faint mockery for the white people, yet watching the bold show of legs of the white girls, and always waiting the chance to pick up a few coins, a few drinks. The Taos did not weave, nor make pottery. They were the song-makers of the pueblo people. But who would buy a song or pay for a ceremony in these modern days? When they could, the young men posed for painters of the art colony, or did odd chores for the white Taoseños. It was terrible to see them and remember the young warriors of the old days. . .

But lately something had happened to change all this. Groups of young men had begun leaving the pueblo every week or two—going away to fight, it was said. Last Bull became fiercely excited over this, until he learned the reason: Some battle the white men were having among themselves in a far place, they told him; the young men must go and help. After that the old man paid no more attention to the matter.

One morning Last Bull sat on his floor-bed facing the gray rectangle of the open door, the only light that came into his bare room. It was Fall and there had been only a couple of sticks of wood in the 'dobe that morning. He had set them burning in the fireplace, but the feeble heat they made was just enough to keep the breath from showing in the chill air. There was not a scrap of food left in the place. The door of his grandson's house was closed. He had not seen him for a day or two and guessed he and his wife were away.

It had been three days since he had been outside of the 'dobe, for he was not well. It seemed much longer than that; time had become so vague. From the huge honey-combed pile of connecting apartments composing the north pueblo came the deep throbbing of a drum, an insistent motif about which the many other sounds of tribal life revolved—neighing of horses, laughter, crying of children, clatter of wagon wheels. It was not plain to Last Bull what part of it all came from outside and what part came from within his own head. He was miserable and full of aches today.

But he had his refuge. He could lose himself in the old chants; his medicine bundle was always with him. He untied it now and laid out the sacred articles before him—pieces of flawless turquoise, prayer sticks, plumed feathers. He could work the subtlest divination, the strongest spells with these, and the making of medicine had become to him as the breath to his nostrils as the years went on. As he handled the old familiar things, he grew stronger and more powerful, his miserable surroundings faded. He began to sing snatches of the ancient happy Song of the Humming Bird to forget the cold.

Yun No He Ya He O He Ya, Ai Ni Ai,
Yun No He Ya He Ya He Ya,
Yun No He Ya He O He Ya, Ai Ni Ya. . .
Ya Ya In Na Ya Ya In Na Ya O Ho Ngo.

A shadow drifted across the threshold and old Sun Shield, otherwise known as Eagle Seizer, brother to the War Chief, stooped and entered. He was one of the elders of the north pueblo. He sat down with a low greeting.

Last Bull did not see him at once. He looked up presently and nodded. Sun Shield was smoking. He spoke, presumably to the smoke in the air, his voice as low and soft as wind in the pines.

"*Llego*, my uncle. Everybody is excited today, because of the hunt. The young men are very happy. They will dance the Buffalo Dance, they say. It is like the old days again. Will you sing?"

Last Bull came in from his drift. Sing? The Buffalo Dance? Had he lost track of time completely? It could not be December yet. But Sun Shield was not laughing. He answered guardedly, ashamed of his failing faculties. "Yes, I will sing."

He always sang with the other elders at the ceremonies: the Summer Corn Dance, San Geronimo, the Deer and Buffalo Dances. But he had thought it late October.

"When they have danced, they will ride out after the buffalo again." Sun Shield was smiling. "It will be hard riding; they are far up among the piñons now."

Buffalo! A spasm of shock, almost terror, passed through him, shaking his mind to its foundation. Had he been living in a dream, among shades? Were the old days still here? He was aquiver to ask questions, but stoically decided not to. He had been living inside so long; perhaps he had lost all sense of time. It did not matter.

SUN SHIELD noticed how weak he was as he gathered his things together. He glanced around at the empty shelves. Many a time before the old man had had to go visiting for food.

"I am a bit hungry," Sun Shield said, as if it were an afterthought. "My wife is cooking food. Will you come with me first?"

"*Bueno.*" Last Bull's owl-nosed profile showed only his customary expression of stoic calm and capacity for suffering. He took up his bundle.

He was so tottery that Sun Shield had to steady him. The insistent voice of the drums enveloped them as they stepped outside. Yes, the song was the Buffalo Song. Yet there were no preparations in the square, no people gathering on the beaten ground near the governor's house.

Sun Shield's wife greeted them as they entered. Goat's ribs were boiling in a pot and at a sign from her husband, the woman served food. They consumed some meat, chile, bread and coffee. Sun Shield pretended to be hungry, so as not to embarrass his friend.

Two double lines of dancers had gathered in the square when they emerged. They stood facing, at some distance apart. The singers began the ceremonial song and one line, representing the hunters, danced in slow pantomime of the hunt. The other line merely shuffled and weaved from side to side. Some of them had their heads in the skulls of buffalo, or wore buffalo skins over their shoulders. They were the game, the great herd, churning restlessly on the verge of flight, like bemused creatures waiting to be pacified by the magic of the song, according to the ancient legend.

But there were not enough of the dancers for real power and Last Bull saw laughter and the mask of absence on most of the faces. The old prescribed ceremony was being cut short. His heart sank downward and rage simmered up. The dance was not a good dance, the medicine was not strong. Were they all dead men or the ghosts of the dead?

A man made room for him among the singers and his voice rose to the limit of its power, high, quavering and insistent, that the animals and the old gods might hear, that his people might not cut themselves off from them forever.

He did not know the dance was just a joke the men had gotten up after twice riding out to round up the escaped buffalo and twice failing among the high piñons. He stressed and repeated the wavering vowel phrases, demanding attention, drawing all the old verses out to the end, exerting himself. The singers smiled and fell in with him until the "game," by slow degrees, had been lured and drawn in, intermingled and thrice surrounded by the "hunters."

It had taken all his surplus strength. He swayed in exhaustion when the song ended, but the thing had been done right. The hunters seemed to have forgotten that in far-off times men and animals had lived together and understood each other. They had spoken the same language then and the animals had known they must be sacrificed that their human brothers might live. That language lived on in the old ceremonies.

Most of the dancers had withdrawn. Last Bull thought he would follow and make a prayer in the *kiva*. All the power would be needed with the people hungry and so many months to go till Spring. The terrible famine months. . .

It seemed a very long way. He stopped by the corral fence. Two figures loomed beside him.

"The hunters are going to try again. The buffalo will be up in the high hills, they think. What do you say, my uncle? Will you tell them something, or make a prayer?"

It seemed like Sun Shield's voice at first. Then he saw Standing Buffalo, his old friend, and on his other side stood Slender Hand, whom he had taught in youth to be wise in medicine. Some part of him knew they were both dead, but he thrust that from him. A sharp, rending pleasure tore through him at the sight of them after so many years, standing proud and erect in breech-clouts and moccasins, wrapped in the old bright blankets instead of the cheap, faded Pendletons.

Now everything began to be clear. The lean, hard Fall—the famine following. The long months to go till Spring. The people were looking to him as a famed hunter; he was *cacique* and they relied on the strength of his vision.

"Get me a horse," he said, and his words had a remembered echo. "I will go up into the hills. There I will make medicine."

He felt the bundle beneath his blanket. They had to help him mount Sun Shield's horse, he was so weak. The long hungry months—but he had the power for the trail. Some of the younger men were laughing, but Last Bull did not see.

HIS hands were uncertain on the reins. He tied his bundle beside the old rifle slung behind the ancient saddle and turned the horse's head along a faint cart-track that led into the hills. At first, he drooped over the pommel in a distorted dream in which the horse and passing shapes had little reality to him. Then he saw the piñons rising ahead, the Sangre de Cristo foothills, for centuries the hunting ground of his people. Out of the depths he rallied, feeling the keen air tingle against his face, the familiar wind of the mountains. His lips began forming hunting chants and prayers to the old gods, and his strength and courage grew.

Back into memory he plunged, but

still there were two things working in him at once. Through his memories peered the reflection of the ragged, decrepit present, the pitiful scarecrow he had become. In fear and grimness he put that picture from him. With all his voice and all his being, he flung himself into chanting in a sort of desperation and soon the vision took him.

His heart soared high above him. He was Swift Arrow again, back in the days when the hills were virgin of even a Mexican cart-track, new as if they had just been made. He thought of the old friends he had hunted with when fall brought the buffalo herds south through Raton Pass, thick as the sage on the plains, thick as the piñons on the hills.

He caught himself with a jerk, gripping the pommel with both hands. He had almost fallen from the saddle. A low voice sounded just beside him. There sat Standing Buffalo, mounted on the powerful buckskin he had always ridden, and there on his other side was Slender Hand, also mounted. How wonderful and warlike they looked! They towered high, so high above him; fifteen, eighteen feet, it seemed, but it was not strange. He, too, had come into his true name, his true stature.

"It is time," Standing Buffalo said. "The game waits there."

He lifted a bright arm and pointed. Then he and Slender Hand rode off into the sunlight. Last Bull hurried after.

He was only a little startled when, on rounding a bend in the cañon, he came face to face with a great buffalo bull. Bursting upon him as the sight did, without warning, he had his agonized moment of incredulity. He shook off the crushing knowledge of the present that was trying again to force itself upon him. A little distance beyond the big bull were the two cows that had escaped with him. Last Bull did not see them. He saw only the single bull. It was like the bull he had killed on the long-ago day of the hunger year. It *was* that bull.

He knew the buffalo could see him, but that did not matter. The game ceremony had been well performed. The bull would give himself up, for he had been told of the great need of the people by their song. Thus for nearly a minute, the ancient Indian and the old bull faced one another. Neither saw the other plainly, for the truth was, the buffalo through his shaggy frontlet saw only a horse standing there. It was the trail's end.

In a sort of ecstasy, Last Bull intoned the final part of the game chant. He spoke to the spirit of the old buffalo in the solemn manner of the ceremonies, paying him compliments, extolling his size and might. Hearing, the old bull swung about, blowing windily. Not until he felt sure the buffalo understood did Last Bull raise his rifle.

The sun struck a gleam from the lifted barrel. The king bull stiffened all over, but for another moment he stood motionless. Then, head down, he charged at horse and rider, bearing both to earth beneath his mighty weight.

In the cañon bottom, the three bodies lay where they had fallen in a tangled heap. But in the gleaming air above the hills, Standing Buffalo and Slender Hand turned and waited till another mounted warrior and a glorious old buffalo joined them. Then all passed upward to that red man's hunting ground where all were brothers.

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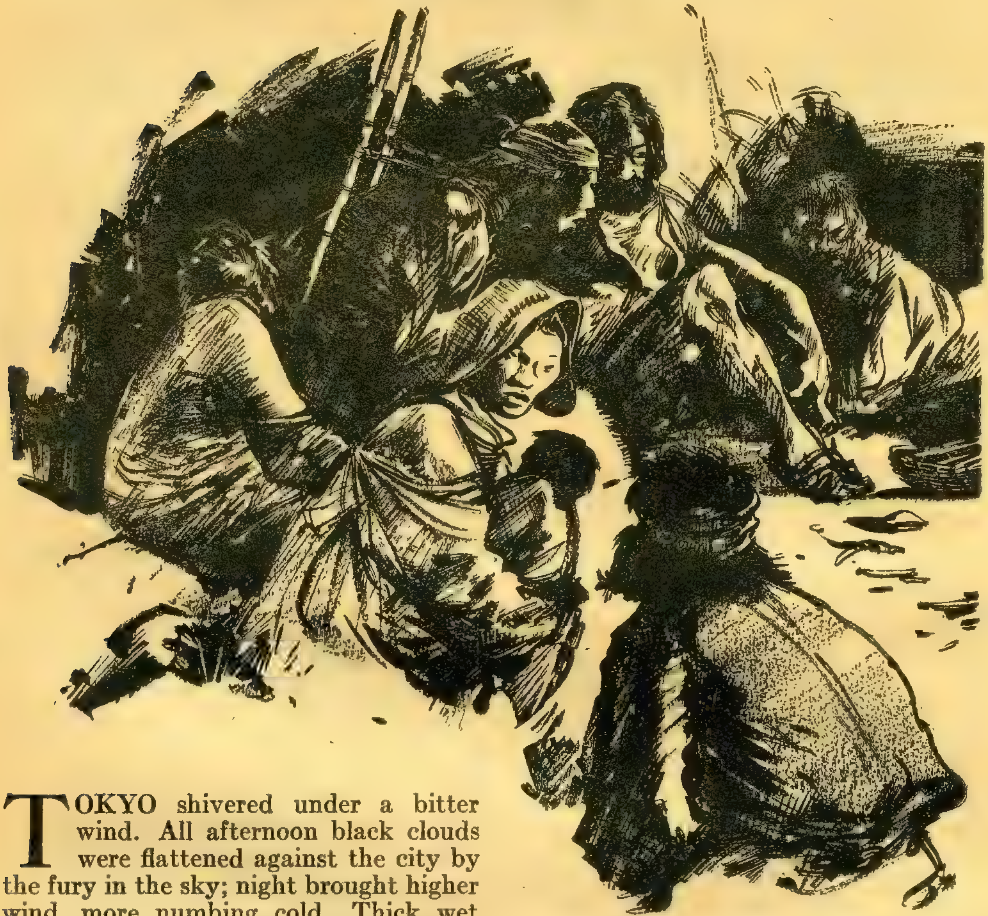
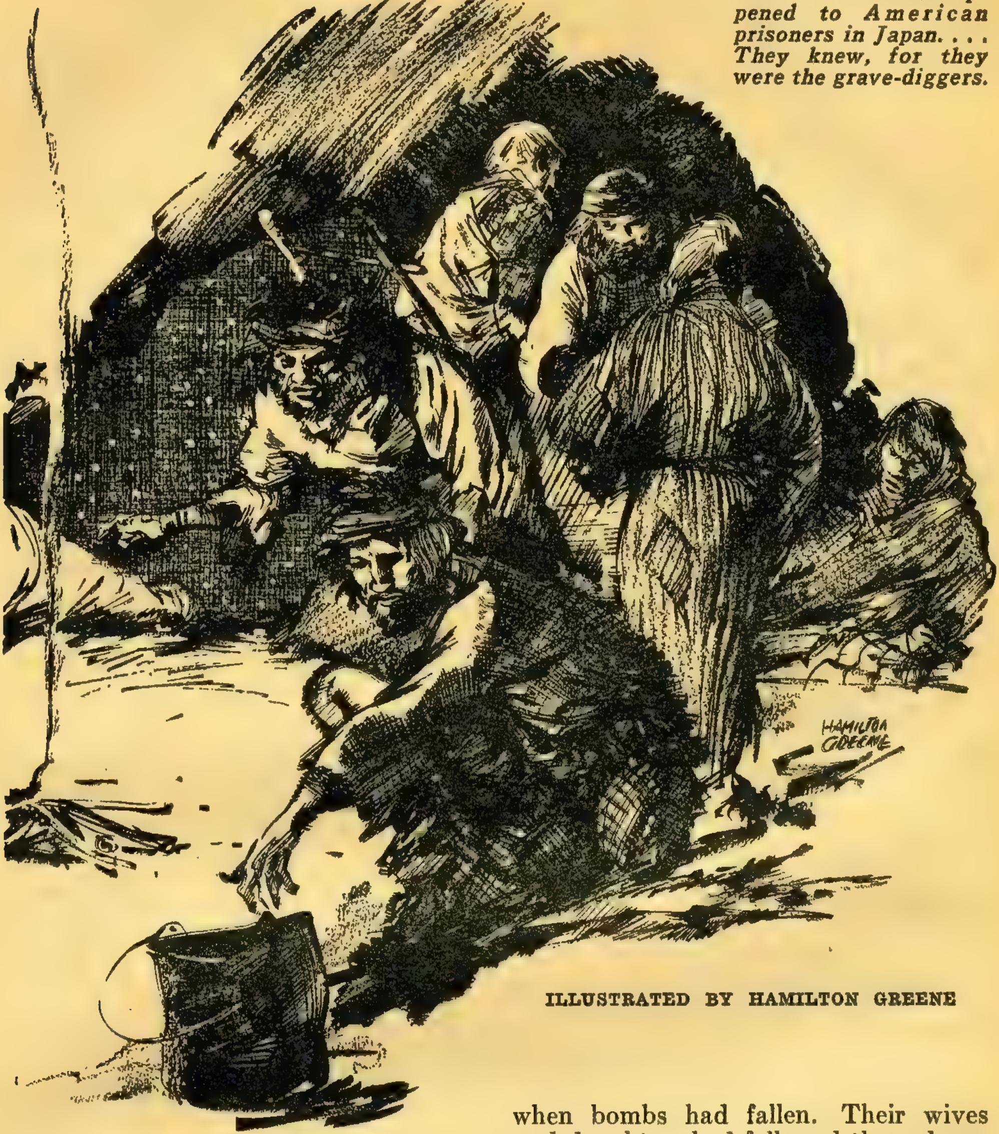


TOKYO shivered under a bitter wind. All afternoon black clouds were flattened against the city by the fury in the sky; night brought higher wind, more numbing cold. Thick wet snow, by nine o'clock, began to swirl down into the gloom of the streets. It froze where it fell.

The wind had started in the north, from Kamchatka and across Chishima Strait and over the Kurile Islands. There it had ripped snow from the rocky flanks and cones of the volcanic peaks which guard the northernmost Japanese naval base of Paramushiru, hurling snow and rocks down into the base itself. The storm hampered labor battalions which were feverishly repairing some of the damage caused by American Liberators. And the wind howled across the graves of Japanese soldiers who could no longer do anything at all.

Outside the fortified area of Para-

Davies heard from the outcast Ainu what happened to American prisoners in Japan. . . . They knew, for they were the grave-diggers.



ILLUSTRATED BY HAMILTON GREENE

mushiru the storm had raged above another burial place, also freshly dug. A hundred Ainu, whose ancestors long ago had been driven to the rocky northern islands by the Japanese, had been dragged out of the caves and mountain huts in which they lived, and shot. They had witnessed the Japanese loss of face when bombs had fallen. Their wives and daughters had followed them down; and while the old women buried the men, the younger women were taken to barracks. The storm covered their screams.

Officially, as all Tokyo knew, including the two policemen who leaned against the wind as they patrolled, the Ainu might have been guilty of signalling to the feared and hated *Amerikajin* flyers. If the peaceful Ainu had not actually signaled to the great bombers, perhaps they would have liked to have done so, which was sufficient reason for punishment.

It was even whispered that one of the Ainu was suspected of being a spy, although this was instantly denied. Such a thought was ridiculous. There was not one single person within the empire who could in any way direct an attack on Japan's sacred soil, nor assist the enemy. The Japanese authorities, knowing so well all of the things which they had planned to have done in America, had prepared against counter-action in Japan with great thoroughness.

Even so, as a new and additional precaution, a dozen Ainu men in each of the squalid pariah villages, where these *eta* performed such work as the Japanese considered degrading, had already been killed as a warning, and fifty young Koreans had also been executed as an example. The authorities did not intend to neglect the slightest detail which would protect Japan.

This was what one of the patrolling officers said to his mate as they reached the corner and turned into the dark east-west street which was partially shielded from the icy lash of the wind.

"*A iu fuzetsu wa ate ni naranai,*" he said. "Likewise, I have heard that their knives are to be taken from the Ainu dogs. That is an excellent decree. It is very wise. I shall feel safer on nights like this."

His companion jeered, "Do you believe that those cowardly pariahs would attack anyone? Oh, what nonsense, Kawase!"

"If it is nonsense," protested Kawase, "why have the officials given the order? Answer that question, if you please."

The other said, as the pair paused now that they were out of the worst of the wind, "The answer is simple. The Ainu cannot make a living without their knives. The pariah dogs who repaired our *geta* can no longer do such work. Naturally, they will starve, thus saving us the trouble of exterminating them."

Kawase, the stockier of the two, demanded, "And what will we do when our clogs are old and must be repaired?"

"You are not patriotic! Our clogs cannot wear out. It is not permitted. They must last until we have won the war."

Although Kawase nodded, he had to protect his reputation for being obedient to decrees, as well as his courage. So he said hastily, "The pariahs are allowed to slaughter food animals for us. If they have no knives, how can they perform this necessary function, Ichida?"

The thin policeman thought of a pan of sizzling horseflesh. "Again," he said, "you fail in patriotism. You think of meat! The only animals which may be killed are for our brave soldiers. Not many Ainu dogs are needed for that task. The rest can starve." Because he was hungry, he added savagely, "And the *Amerika-jin* had better not accuse us of murdering them, either! Oh, how I would like to get the neck of an American between my fingers!"

"An *Amerika-jin,*" snorted Kawase. It was he who could now jeer at the other. "Ho! What chance do you think there is of one being here? None!"

"*Sore wa kodomo demo wakaru,*" agreed Ichida. "Even a child understands that. Of course it is impossible."

THE pair stood against the side of a dark house. When the wind diminished a moment, they could hear inside the chop-chop-chop of *nanakusa-no-kayu* being prepared, and both swallowed, because a bowl of the thick rice gruel in which seven varieties of pungent greens were mixed would have tasted very good. They could also hear, before the wind whipped up again, the song being sung as the savory greens were beaten to a pulp on the chopping-block.

Few crimes were ever committed in this district, in which clerks and artisans lived. The street, after several twists and turns, ended at the bay, where river boats and small coastal steamers docked, although any traffic of importance went along a broader thoroughfare to the west. The worst thing which ever happened on this beat was the homeward return of a drunken clerk and the reception which his wife might give him.

The two officers had nothing to fear nor guard against except the rounds made by their sergeant; and certainly he would prefer to remain in the station on this bitter winter night. Both were cold. Both were hungry. Both told themselves that these were honorable feelings, because by being cold and hungry they were assisting fighting men to be warm and well fed.

"We have only three more hours of duty," said Ichida. "At least we are better off than the thousands of starving *Amerika-jin* soldiers whom our clever generals have trapped on Attu and Kiska. And we are certainly happier than the flyers our brave aviators shot down at Paramushiru. Oh, how I wish I had been there when they crashed to earth! I would know what to do with such arrogant and insulting men! I pray that perhaps some day I may be fortunate to get my hands on an American flyer. Then I will—"

He stopped. A new sound, weird and penetrating even in the storm, moaned down the dreary snow-covered street.

"Na - be - yaaaa - ki - udooon! Na-be-yaaaa-ki-udoooon!"

The dimmest of lights appeared at the cityward intersection, light from a long square paper lantern. The snow, where the flickering yellowness made a feeble glow in the gloom, reflected the dull color.

"Na-be-yaaaa-ki-udoooon!"

The melancholy cry of the hot-dough vendor, the sight of the hawker's lantern, and the condition of Ichida's own belly, made the thin policeman lick his lips and swallow painfully. When the cry was repeated again and doors began to open, Ichida demanded of his companion, "Have you any money?"

"No," admitted Kawase.

"Not even four *sen?* Enough for one bowl? We could divide it."

Kawase said hungrily, "I gave my wife my last weekly money to buy hot roasted sweet potatoes for us when I return to our room. A hot potato is—"

"Do not mention food," growled Ichida. "I am indeed empty. If it were not a violation of regulations, I would order the vendor to trust me. It is possible," he mourned, as the lantern became stationary when customers from houses came up to buy the little cylinders of hot dough, "that there may be fish and vegetables cooked with the *udon.*"

"Yes," agreed Kawase sadly.

The lantern now hung from the hawker's staff, which had been thrust into the earth. The vendor himself was kneeling in the snow, crouched before a small iron cooking apparatus. He was kindling the charcoal fire by fanning the coals with a round-fan; the little pots of *udon* would soon begin to steam.

"It tastes best when eaten directly from the pot," said Ichida. "Putting *udon* into a bowl spoils the flavor."

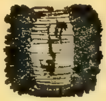
Soon the fragrance of food was blown along the street, and the nostrils of the policemen began to twitch. Because purchasers were standing around the vendor, all that the hungry pair could see of him was his shabby blue jacket and the discolored and tattered blue cotton drawers which covered his legs. But when a heavy gust of wind whipped at the women's *kimonos* as they waited, and they moved to better cover themselves, the officers had their first real look at the stocky man who was crouched before the cooking-fire.

The charcoal was glowing well. It gleamed on a dark face, and seemed to strike sparks from dark eyes. The face was gaunt, what could be seen of it; but, as the startled officers saw, it was bearded.

An Ainu! A pariah.

Ichida said, under his breath, "I must be so hungry that I see something which is not there! Why, this is not possible!" He closed his eyes, while his companion stared dumbly at the vendor; but when he opened them again he still saw the bearded, gaunt face with light gleaming on it.

"Stop!" he shouted. "This is not permitted!"



HE was running toward the light, the waiting matrons, the vendor who was now ladling out steaming *udon* and sauce into a bowl which one of the women was holding. Kawase was at Ichida's heels. Ichida snatched the half-filled bowl from the woman and slapped her twice, hard.

"You should not buy food from an Ainu," he cried furiously. "For all you know, the *udon* has been poisoned with bear-gall. You will sicken. You will be unable to bear children. You will be unable to work. How can you be so lacking in patriotism?"

"*Kekko desu,* officer-*san,*" a grandmother pleaded. "Please forgive her, and all of us. The pariah has been in this street twice before. He has a police-signed permit to sell the *udon.* It is good *udon,* officer-*san.* We have all eaten of it and not been made ill. It—"

Ichida turned on her.

"How could he have been in the streets without our having seen him? *Bakana koto wo itteru.* You are talking nonsense."

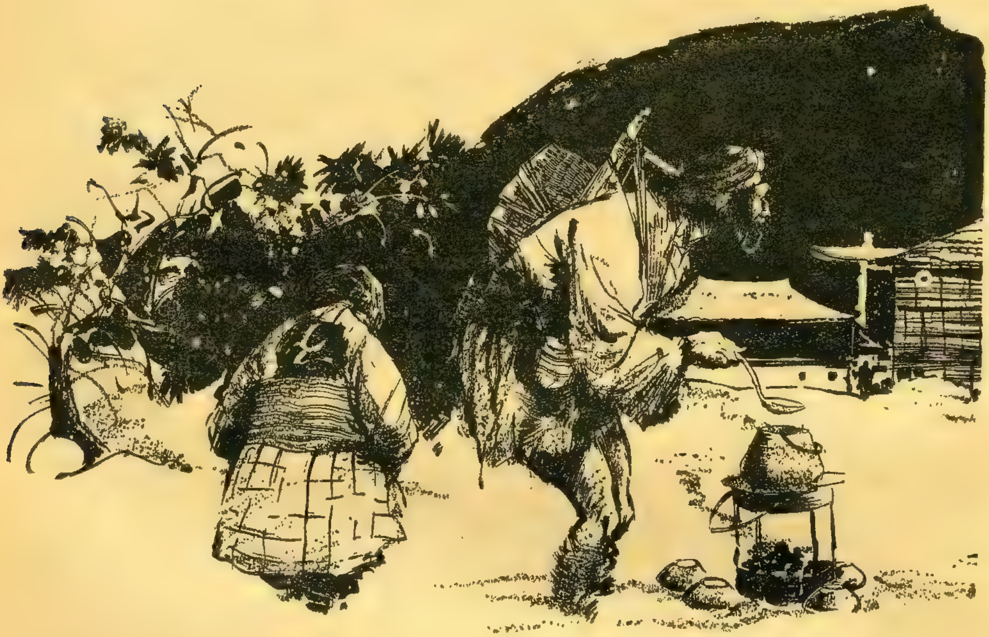
His mate, Kawase, suggested mildly, "It is a large district which we patrol, Ichida. Surely that is why we have not encountered him before."

Ichida, nodding briefly, jerked off a glove, thrust his fingers into the bowl which he held, and shovelled dripping *udon* into his mouth. "Let me see this permit," he demanded of the bearded vendor, speaking with full mouth. "Come, pariah dog! Hurry!" He swallowed and filled his mouth again. "I have no time to waste. Show me! Or do you only understand dog language?"

The stocky, bearded man, crouched on the snow, bowed submissively as he placed his ladle down. If it hissed on the snow, the wind covered so small a sound.

The man opened the Ainu bag-purse which was fastened to the bearskin girdle about his middle, and took out a folded piece of paper.

"*Taihen ni o mat'se mosh'ta,*" he said in Japanese, but with the Ainu accent strong in his quiet voice. "Forgive my slowness."



Because Ichida had rammed more *udon* into his mouth, it was Kawase who asked, "Have your dog-parents given you a name, Ainu?"

"*Wat'kush' wa Koropok to mosh'-masu,*" the swarthy vendor replied. "My name is Koropok. My father's name was—"

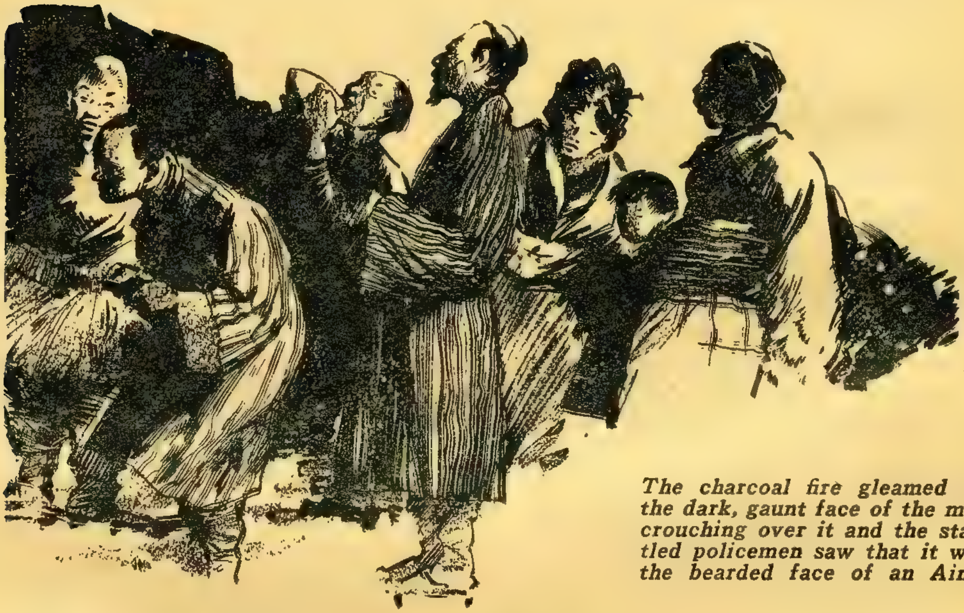
"It is doubtful if you had a father," Ichida broke in.

The women laughed at such a humorous comment. Ichida, pleased that his wit was recognized, drained off the liquid in the bowl noisily. Then he grabbed the permit from the crouching vendor and held it so that the brightly glowing charcoal cast a flickering light upon it. He examined it carefully.

Wind almost ripped the paper from the Japanese' greasy fingers as he read. "I do not see how you obtained this permission to sell *udon*," he grumbled. "However, it appears to be in order."

The man who called himself Koropok said nothing.

He had been given the permit because for months he had repaired *geta* for the family and relatives of a minor police official named Kodzuke Yotsuye, and had never received any payment. He had refused payment the first time, pleading that the honor of cutting down a great personage's clogs so that an honorable male-child of the official could wear them was sufficient reward. After that, payment was never mentioned. But when knives were taken from the pariahs, Yotsuye realized that the pariah would need the money, which the official feared had mounted to an inconvenient sum; and while Koropok would be thrown out of a police station if he went to complain, the circumstance would be a blot on Yotsuye's record. He did not want his superiors to hear of his debt, so he had figured out a solution.



The charcoal fire gleamed on the dark, gaunt face of the man crouching over it and the startled policemen saw that it was the bearded face of an Ainu.

Since an old *udon*-vendor had died, Kodzuke Yotsuye had arranged for the pariah to take over the meager equipment, the little bag of flour, the charcoal and fan. It was to be used only until a Japanese *udon*-vendor could be found, Yotsuye said to his superior; surely it was wise not to deprive war workers of their favorite cheap nightly food. The higher official had agreed, after insisting on half of the profit which Yotsuye was to receive, which was to be half of whatever the pariah might earn. In addition, both Japanese agreed that if they were called upon to explain the issuing of the permit they would deny having done so. They would insist that in some way the Ainu dog had found a paper bearing their signatures, and had forged their names.

All three involved in the arrangement were satisfied. Kodzuke Yotsuye was relieved of what might have been an embarrassing little debt. The higher official was pleased to receive a few extra coins in these days of terrible taxes. And the fellow who was called Koropok, the Ainu, the despised pariah, could continue to earn enough to keep him alive on the streets of Tokyo.

It did not occur to Kodzuke Yotsuye that the gaunt, bearded man in tattered, insufficient clothing might actually have singled him out as one who had a poorly paid police assignment. Nor did it occur to the Japanese that the pariah might know what the assignment was.

ON the icy street, the officer Ichida shoved the empty bowl at the silent man on the snow. "Fill it," he said. When this was done, he explained to Kawase and the others, "I do this at great personal risk, and for your benefit. If the *udon* has been poisoned, to kill your husbands and sons who make the implements of war which are defeating the cowardly and unspeakable *Amerika-jin,* it is I who will die, and not they. I hope you appreciate this fact."

The vendor said humbly, as he fished around in one of the steaming pots, "Oh, such courage!" and Ichida lapped up the praise along with the hot food. "Please," the bearded man asked, as he began to fill the women's bowls without objection from the officers, "is it true that the people whom you call *Amerika-jin* are now being captured in large numbers, officer-*san?*"

"This very night," said Ichida importantly, feeling very fine now that his belly was full, "there will be many—"

The Japanese broke off in the middle of the word. Japanese police were trained to ask questions, and not answer them. He stared at the vendor, and then he snapped, "How dare you ask a question of me, dog?"

Ichida's hand went from the butt of his holstered gun to the handle of the club at his belt. The man in blue bowed his head to accept the expected blow.

The officer used neither of the weapons. His eyes lit until they had a gleam like the charcoal. He reached down, tore the iron ladle from Koropok's hand, and thrust it into the glowing coals; he withdrew it quickly, and with almost the same motion pressed it against the cheek of the kneeling man.

The heated metal made no sound when it touched skin, nor did the man himself. There was the wind, and the banging of a loose door, and the indrawn breath of a bystander, and Ichida's own ejaculation of rage. There was a little hiss, also, as sweat from the pariah's forehead dripped down to the iron.

Koropok's eyes did not shut, but his teeth ground together. Sweat beaded his forehead and, in the vermilion glow of the charcoal fire, glistened in his shaggy hair and beard. Once it looked as if he might reel from his knees and fall forward to the snow; but he did not. If the physical agony was tearing at him, it showed only in the throbbing of his veins, which the audience could not see.

"He is an animal," Ichida yelled. "He has no feelings."

Kawase mumbled, "If he makes complaint to our superiors—"

"I will say that he was drunk and fell against his stove, and you will be witness to it." Ichida threw the ladle down to the snow. "Let me tell you this," said the policeman, lifting his voice, "if he were an *Amerika-jin* soldier, he would have screamed and begged for mercy. Oh, how I would enjoy marking one of those fiends who dare to think of attacking our sacred Nippon!"

The eyes of the pariah flickered, but he said nothing. He reached out, a bit slowly, for the ladle; he did not touch his cheek with the other hand, but began fanning the coals again.

"This is amusing," grunted Ichida, obviously casting about for some other way to degrade the pariah and show his own importance. "Why not—"

Kawase pleaded, "We must make our rounds."

"Do not remind me of my duty," said Ichida. He was frowning, being disappointed because the Ainu had not grovelled; he said to the man on the snow, as Koropok prepared to fill the bowls of the chilled women, "Cause me trouble again, and you will be accorded the treatment given an *Amerika-jin* flyer."

"Oh, please, no," whimpered the man in tattered blue. "Oh, no, lord. I could not stand such terrible things. I would die!"

"So do they," Ichida snarled.

"G'men nag'ra," apologized the kneeling man abjectedly, in his Ainu accent. "I am sorry to have troubled you, lord."

He was not sorry at all, not even at the cost of his seared cheek, which, as the officers trotted off along the street, was beginning to blister. He was not in the least sorry that he had asked a question which had brought him agony, because, as he had hoped, the pompous Japanese policeman had been unable to resist indicating to the audience that he, a great man, knew the answer. Ichida had said enough for the vendor of *udon* to guess the rest.

And this was why he was peddling hot dough cooked with sauce, since clogs could not be repaired without a knife, on the wind-swept streets of Tokyo on this bitter winter night. This was why he was in Japan.

He said to himself, as the wind roared with renewed force, keeping the coals glowing even without being fanned, *You damned fool! He wanted you to beg for mercy. Why didn't you do it, you stiff-necked idiot? You're as bad as he. You had to show what a tough guy you are. If something like this happens again, get some sense into this dumb dome of yours.* But he kept ladling out *udon.*

LIEUTENANT LLEWELYN DAVIES, AC, was, to the Japanese, an Ainu named Koropok. A stocky, bearded, dark man, like his Welch ancestors, he was amazingly similar in appearance to the Ainu of north Japan.

He had been set ashore there in dense fog, and had made his way in Ainu dress to a mountain settlement, to be accepted by the peaceful kindly people. The locality was far from the one in which he had lived with his doctor father, and where he had played with the Ainu children almost as one of them. His disguise, when he left the village for the coast again, had fooled the Japanese authorities, despite their boast that not one single American was in the empire, except in prison camps or in graves. He had finally reached Tokyo.

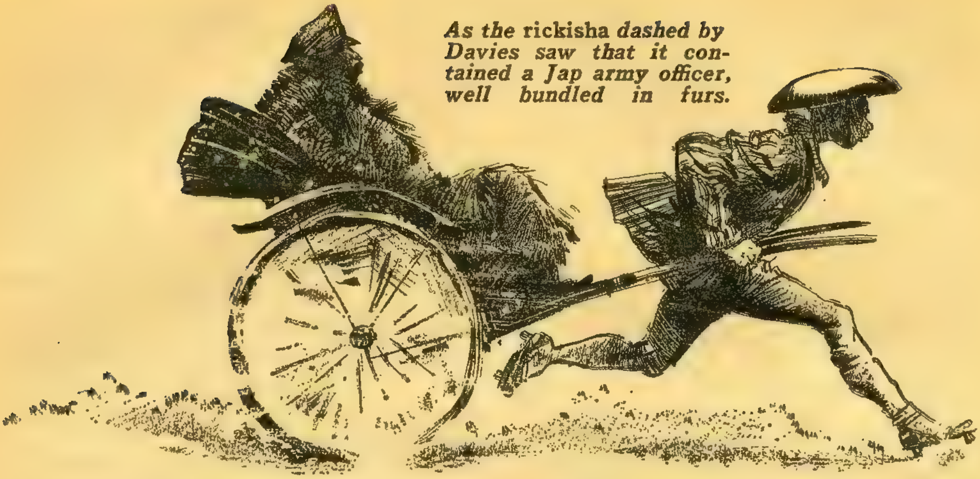
Twice already he had brought misery to the Japanese. Each time he did it, he knew, brought detection and death that much nearer. Therefore each succeeding operation must be as damaging to the shrewd enemy as possible. Whatever he did must badly cripple the Japanese war effort. He had directed American bombers in dropping their explosives on an arsenal which looked like houses; he had destroyed the entire quantity of a strange oil crushed from fireflies which was used in the building of Japanese warplanes.

Now, he wanted to do that which would hurt the Japanese for a third time. If only he could know the targets which his old companions would seek out in Tokyo! That was what he decided to try and find out.

Davies, disguised as Koropok, had figured out several ways to cause the Nips such grief as the thin policeman, Ichida, had never dreamed of. Each meant risk. Of course, everything he did meant risk; this was why Davies told himself that every objective had to be the most important he could find, because it was apt to be his last one. What would the gang want knocked out?

He knew Tokyo. First as a *geta*-mender, now as a vendor of cheap food, he had ranged the streets, showing his permit whenever demanded, insulted a thousand times a day, and as often by night. He slept when and where he could. He did not always eat; sometimes what few coins he had earned were taken from him by *bukuchi-uchi,* ruffians and thieves, after they had thrown him, unresisting, to the street. He became gaunt, but there burned a steady fire in him, far more bitter and painful than that now on his cheek; he knew what had happened to his fellow-soldiers who had bombed Tokyo's military objectives.

The wind shrilled like the rasping of metal on metal as "Koropok" filled the last of the bowls. After the women hastened back to their houses with the steaming food for their men, the pariah picked up his cooking apparatus and began walking again, his lantern yellowing the snow.



As the rickisha *dashed by Davies saw that it contained a Jap army officer, well bundled in furs.*

He cried mournfully, "*Na-be-yaaa-ki-udooooon!*" but few people, sheltered from the storm, could hear him. Everyone who did not have to be out was huddled indoors, trying to keep warm. The wind was rising.

Wind and snow slashed at the great blister on his cheek and broke it. Before long the wound became raw and ugly, sending a growing pain into his head. He kept on shouting his wares, in case the same officers, or others, might chance to see him, but he no longer paused to give householders an opportunity to come out and buy from him. He kept walking more and more quickly, burdened as he was with lantern, staff, stove, pots, and bag of dough, always making his way toward the arm of the bay and the usually deserted dock where prisoners were landed under a heavy guard from coastal ships.

This was the sort of knowledge which Davies picked up, a bit here, a bit there, on the Tokyo streets. The sort of thing he had to know in order to be able to accomplish the sabotage work he was doing single-handed.

I can do this once, Lew thought. *Just once. It's what I've got to do. I must feel that every time I try to raise hell with the Nips it will be my last shot at them. It's got to count. Then, if I get away with it, and live, I can begin worrying about the next time.*

The prisoners wouldn't be fellows who might have been knocked down at Paramushiru, because there hadn't been time for them to have reached Tokyo; but Davies fervently hoped that someone from Air Forces would be in the group of prisoners. Men from that branch of the service would know which objectives the command most wished eliminated. Given such information, Davies intended to do whatever he could about it. He had prepared himself well. If he failed, it would be while attempting something worth doing.

I can raise hell with one of their war plants, Lew thought, as he neared an alley not far from the muddy waters of the bay, *but it must be the right one. It can't be done twice.*

He had catalogued the plants in Tokyo, but there was no way of knowing exactly what was manufactured inside, not even for a person who listened to workers, half drunk, in the *muryo shukuhakujo,* the inns to which they went when they had no *sen* left to sleep in the cheapest of pay-inns.

He did know that the Japanese had stepped up production now that it was becoming obvious that the supposedly soft and cowardly Americans were beginning to attack.

It was his duty to do something about it.

One man.

But first he must contact one of the prisoners who could tell him which plants were considered by G-2 to be important military objectives.

DAVIES saw the feeble flicker of a lantern when he reached the next narrow intersection. From the manner in which it was bobbing up and down, it was fastened to a *rickisha.* He blew out his own candle hastily and backed against the black wall of a warehouse. He could not hear the cart's approach; but when the old man who was pulling it came into view at the corner, Davies saw that he was exerting himself to the limit. Truly hurrying. In the cart itself was an army officer, well bundled in furs.

When the *rickisha's* lantern vanished, and the snow slammed down with renewed force, Davies looked about him. Prisoners were certainly being landed. No paunched Nip officer would venture out on a night like this except for a reason; and what better reason could he have, since he was going toward the isolated landing dock, than the arrival of a contingent of prisoners? Therefore the blurted, boastful words of Ichida seemed verified.

Lew had overheard what happened to prisoners who were brought to Japan. Every low eating-stall buzzed with the stories. He had heard more of them from the Ainu in the pariah village on the city's outskirts, and these simple and unhappy people were incapable of elaboration. They knew, firsthand. For they were the attendants at executions, and the carriers of dead bodies, and the diggers of graves. Some of them were herded to the dock when a prison ship arrived; and what they told "Koropok" had convinced him of the practicability of his plan.

The time had come to put it to the test.

He looked about for a place to hide his stove, lantern and pots, and found one in an empty stand where, when excursionists had flocked to the pier before the war, boiled clam-bellies from the bay had been sold. The moment he had concealed that with which he earned food for himself, he hurried bayward.

Davies forgot the throbbing pain of his raw wound. He thought, *I want to see my own kind again,* and this made him shake a little, because he had been so utterly alone.

Then, as the deserted street made a right-angled turn, and he could see the shielded lights of the dock and hear the whine of the wind in the wires, he muttered, "What's the matter with you? Are you going to start feeling sorry for yourself?" He lowered his head, crept along the edge of a warehouse and, alert and on edge, peered to see what he hoped was somewhere on the dock.

At first all Lew saw was the few lights and the yellow pools beneath, where groups of Japanese soldiers were huddled together. The dock was completely open to the storm. Next Davies made out a crude wooden windbreak, erected to protect officials and officers. He saw, or thought he saw, a winking light down the bay, which might be the prison ship.

Not until he edged closer was he able to make out the miserable, half-frozen Ainu, with two Japanese soldiers guarding them. Every so often, the Ainu were pushed out of the circle into which, for the warmth of bodies pressed together, they instinctively formed. The soldiers enjoyed the suffering of the true natives of Japan, and forced them to feel the full brunt of the storm. Nor did the sorrowful, bearded men protest. The Ainu knew better.

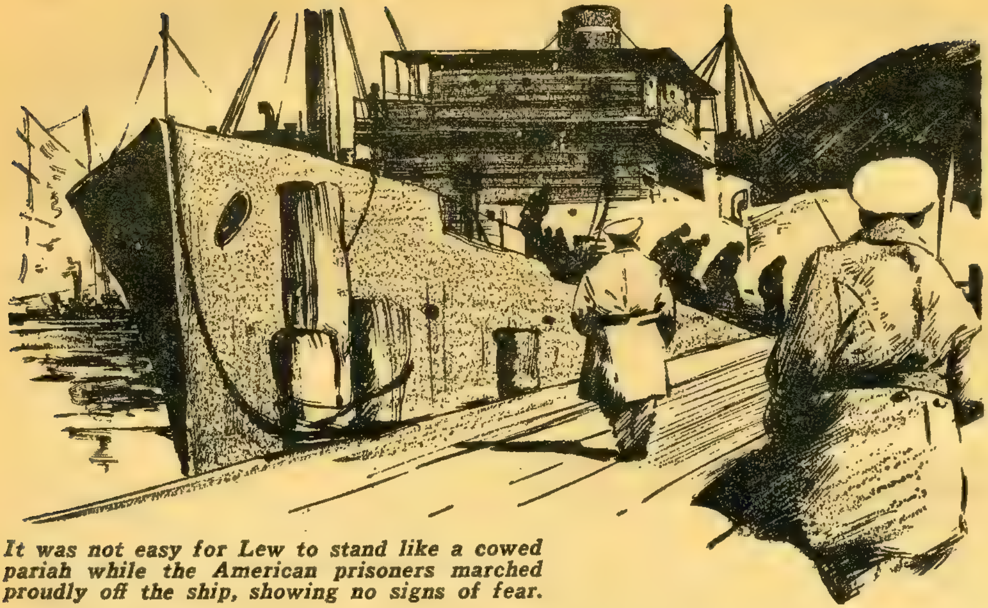
When the ship landed, as Davies knew, the Ainu would carry off the bodies of those prisoners who had died during the voyage.

The winking of the light, sometimes curtained and invisible when the snow fell more heavily, was becoming brighter. Davies crept as close to the Ainu who stood nearest shore as he believed wise.

When the ship's siren hooted, Lew's heart began to beat faster.

Would he recognize anyone? And, now that the time was approaching, would what he had planned really work? A hundred doubts assailed him, he who had been so sure before. *If I muff it,* thought Lew, *I'll never have another chance.*

He hoped, but without fear, that if things went wrong he would be shot, and shot dead, on the dock. That would be better than . . . than what happened to Americans. And the rage of the Japanese, if they penetrated his disguise, was a terrible thing to contemplate.



It was not easy for Lew to stand like a cowed pariah while the American prisoners marched proudly off the ship, showing no signs of fear.

The ordinarily placid bay and the river mouth were roiled and muddy. Waves were shouldering at the end of the dock and, when the coaster inched near, tried to pound the shallow-draft vessel against the piles.

Davies, crouched in darkness, did not move. His eyes were on the two soldiers guarding the huddled Ainu.

A rope was thrown, and a second. The soldiers, all except the two guards, came to attention. The officers strutted forward.

When the gangplank was rolled up and the highest officer on shipboard appeared and began to walk down, the guards also came to attention, facing the ship. At that exact instant, Davies raced to the dock and stopped only when he was standing between two of the Ainu, an inconspicuous member of their ragged group. None of the soldiers had seen him.

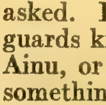
He looked like them: dark, bearded, swarthy. One of them. A pariah.

One of the men was repeating, "*Tokap rere ko tu*," as protection against the demons which brought storms, and the rest dutifully mouthed the words along with him. One said, "Koropok." That was all.

Davies knew that he had nothing to fear from them. They would say nothing of his joining them, unless the Japanese asked. Lew did not believe that the guards knew whether there were sixteen Ainu, or twenty, or thirty. And unless something happened to draw attention to the fact that there was an additional pariah in the group, nobody else would care either.

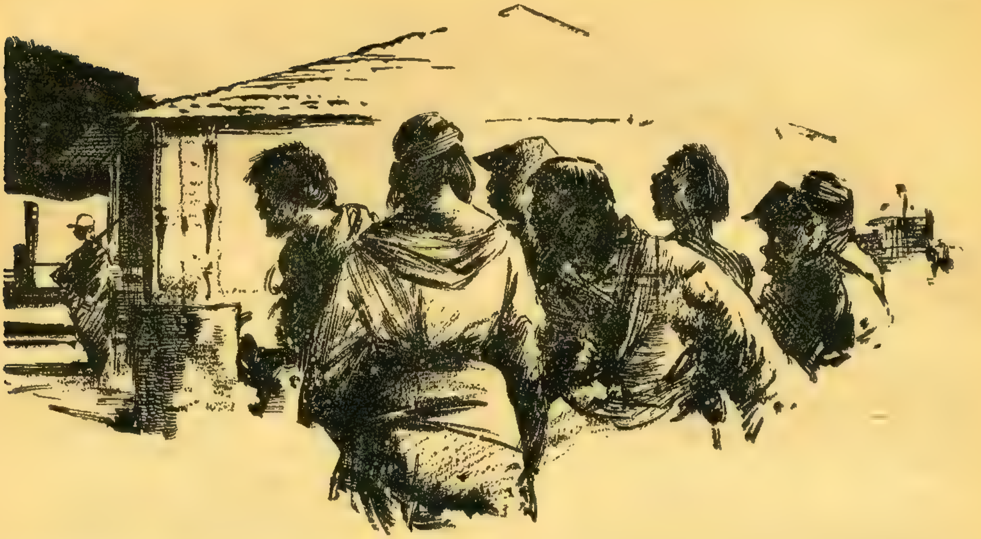
This was not guesswork. He had found out, from the Ainu themselves, how the Japanese did their checking. It was done on arrival at the pier, and only then. So he, as like them as one man can be to others, should be as safe as his dangerous undertaking would allow him to be.

Whatever he did, up to the time of attempted accomplishment, had to have the best possible chance of success. That was why he was in Tokyo.



THE officer from the ship, followed by others, were shaking hands and bowing on the dock. Lew could imagine the congratulations which were being made, and the pseudo-modest replies, though he would not hear them.

An infantry officer gave a command and the soldiers formed quickly for the march to whichever station would start the prisoners on their railroad journey to camp. At least, Lew thought, they aren't going to the coal mines or they



wouldn't have been shipped to Tokyo.

He watched the squad which formed near the Ainu, which would lead the way; two lines formed behind, six feet apart. There would be a rear guard at the end.

Here they come, his lips formed. *Here they come.*

It was not easy for Davies to stand like a cowed pariah, because the Americans came down the gangplank with the pride of men who had fought well and whose hearts were strong.

My gang, thought Lew. *My gang. Guys with guts.*

The unwounded officers and men came first, to be marched between the lines of untidy Japanese infantrymen. All bars and stripes had been torn off. Not an American wore a coat. But they stood so straight and tall and defiant that a Japanese official, infuriated by their attitude, shouted a command and the Jap soldiers dutifully began to sing one of their war-songs.

There were few unwounded Americans. Before these had been marched to where the first squad waited, to head the procession to the railway station, the walking wounded, bandaged, limping, the one helping the other, started down the gangplank. And they, too, showed not the least sign of fear.

My gang, thought Lew again. He couldn't let them down. They, he felt, had done much; he had done so little, compared to them.

It was not easy to discern the faces of the prisoners in the dim, snow-obscured light. Davies saw no man who was familiar to him. But if only some one of them was on his toes! *Just one, please,* Lew prayed. *Just one. I need one fellow who'll use his bean. That's all.*

The head of the American column had stopped. It was less than ten feet from the guarded group of Ainu, and the two assigned soldiers were staring at the prisoners, who showed their lack of fear in eyes and carriage and who looked straight ahead.

"They are large and strong," one of the Japanese soldiers whispered. "It is not surprising that my three brothers are dead."

His mate said curtly, "Animals are large. Animals are strong. They are animals. They are *keto-jin,* hairy ones, like the pariahs. Spit at them."

This was the time. Now. He dare not wait any longer.

"G-2," Davies cried clearly, almost as an echo to the Japanese' words. "Give me an objective." He ran this together like one word. Then, finding it hard to control his voice, he repeated, "G-2! G-2!"

Would it work? Oh, would it work? There were no officers, who might have known what G-2 meant, anywhere near. Would it work?

The curtly-speaking Japanese shouted, "Which of you Ainu dogs has been kicking? Who barked, '*Ke-ru*' like the dog he truly is?"

G-2. Ke-ru. The sounds, in the storm, were almost exact. But if one meant Intelligence, the other meant that the person who had uttered it was protesting at having been kicked. The words that Davies had slurred together in between had been taken by the Japanese for Ainu dialect.

On shipboard, the sailors, not to be outdone by the Army ashore, were shrilling their own song:

See! The sun flag! How it flutters
Shining in the morning sunlight!
See! Advance our battle-squadrons
From Chishima . . .

Only it was the American Liberator squadron which had roared over Chishima, as Davies, waiting painfully, like ice now, knew.

Would it work? Would it work?

There was the singing of the seamen on the ship, and the whine of wind in the wires, and the grinding of the vessel's side against the dock. . . .

Prisoners on stretchers were being carried from the ship; soon the Ainu would shuffle up the gangplank, to return with the dead. There was little time left; and as the heartbreaking minutes passed, Davies saw that one of the prisoners spoke to another, who shook his head violently in dissent.

They think it's a slick Jap trick, Davies realized.

There was one more thing to try.

"Davies!" Lew called swiftly. Any fellow-soldier would know that no man assigned to Davies' duty would have revealed his name so that the Japanese could make use of it. Now . . . was there anyone among the Americans who had known him, or who knew the duty to which he had been assigned?

The guards, about to scream at their pariah charges for crying out a word which must be an Ainu-language protest against the previous kick, heard the abrupt order which meant they must bring the body-carriers to the ship.

"Beside a dump where they go with lanterns," Lew heard. "Luck, boy!"

An infantryman slapped the officer who had spoken. Hard. The wind whined like the twanging of a *samisen.* The pariahs, "Koropok" among them, were pushed along the dock toward the gangplank.

"BESIDE a dump where they go with lanterns." That's all he knows, thought Davies. *It's something he's heard. Where'll it be? What'll it be?* Well, he would find out. You bet he'd find out. Nothing would stop him. Nothing.

"Luck, boy!" was in his head as he accompanied the pariahs along the dock and up the gangplank. He was struck with gun-butts when he moved too slowly, or for no reason at all. He was kicked when he stooped to lift one end of a coffin. "Luck, boy!" A Japanese officer slashed at him, as at the others, with a cane. But he was unchallenged as he bore his share of the load from the ship.

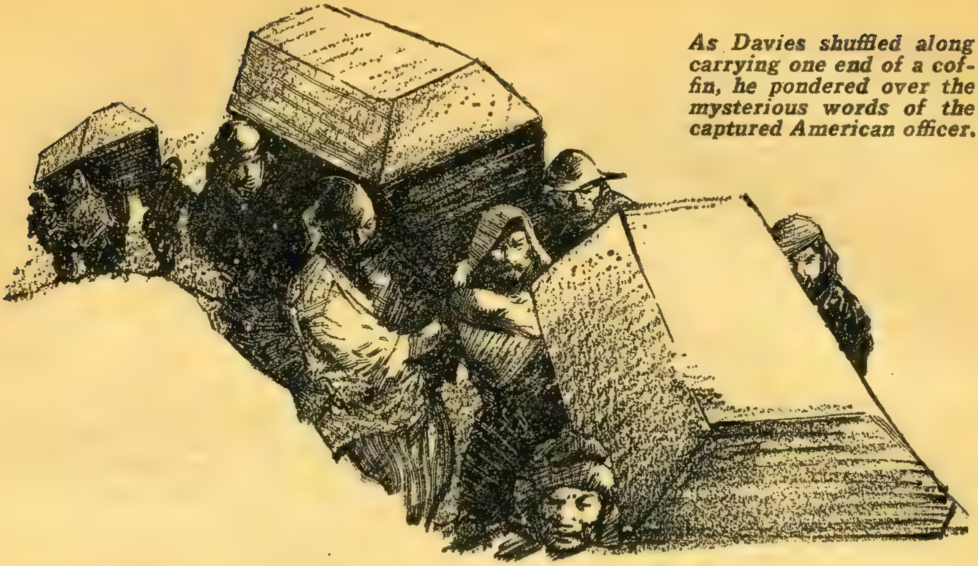
Who was in the coffin? Some poor devil who had died on shipboard.

Beside a dump where they go with lanterns, pondered Lew. *I've got to figure that out. And when I do,* he promised, thinking of the soldier whose body he was helping carry, *I'll square things for you, old man.*

A dump? A coal dump? Possibly one outside a mine where lanterns were used? No. The prisoner had called, "Beside a dump where lanterns are used," which must mean the lanterns were used at the "dump" itself.

The prisoners were being marched in one direction; the body-carriers and their two guards moved in another. The Ainu would carry the coffins all the way to the place of interment; that was the cheapest means of transportation. If they were paid, the infinitesimal amount would be flung at them.

The customary night-sounds of Tokyo in winter were almost all smothered by the wind as the cortege moved through the city as quickly as the guards could hurry the half-starved pariahs. "Koropok" carried the rear end of a coffin.



As Davies shuffled along carrying one end of a coffin, he pondered over the mysterious words of the captured American officer.

To him, as he puzzled over the cryptic answer of the Americans, a few sounds managed to penetrate. The sad "*Ammaaa kamiii-shiiimo!*" and the peeping of the whistle of the blind masseuse who begged for customers. The rattle of a *rickisha*. The howls of a drunken colonel who had an opium concession in occupied China.

The snow was diminishing, but the cold grew. It was crisp underfoot now. The ground crackled when Davies' sandalled feet trod down.

Beside a dump where they go with lanterns. Beside a dump . . .

The man known as Koropok heard a different and not usual sound, which broke into his thoughts. It was the ringing of small bells. Although the street on which the cortege moved was empty, he knew almost at once that the little bells were being carried by *kammairi*, white-robed worshippers running to the temples — to Funkagawa, Kotohira, Toyokawa-Inari—running, carrying their lanterns. . .

A dump . . . a place! Of course the prisoner wouldn't say what the place might be, so he'd used slang. A dump. Beside a dump where lanterns were used; beside a temple. That was it. The Japanese were great on having potential air targets near shrines or temples, believing that the stupid Americans would leave these unbombed. Why, one great ammunition dump was near a shrine. . .

Did the American at the dock mean an ammunition dump? Davies did not think so. Lanterns were kept far from explosives.

"Dump" had to be slang for the place beside the objective. The place had to be a war plant which Air Forces wanted to eliminate. Davies had been given information as to where it was: where Japanese went with lanterns.

It must be a famous temple, decided Lew, as the line of body-carriers reached a principal street. *Otherwise people at home wouldn't know about it. Which came first to my mind? Funkagawa. Of course. I'll check on it first. It's a cinch to do that. The* hadakamairi *will be tickled to buy that* udon.

He couldn't do it this night; he had to get back to the pariah village first. But tomorrow, when the naked worshippers ran with their lanterns and bells to the temple after dark, "Koropok" would be there also.

It didn't matter what sort of war factory would be beside the temple. The Nips constructed one just like another. No wonder the Chinese called them the small brown monkeys.

In the bag, thought Lew. *In the bag.*

It was then that he realized that two Japanese policemen, who had been standing out of sight on the main street, were staring at him. The shielded electric light was on his face, his scarred face. Although Davies could not make out the officers clearly, and dared not look up and stare, he was suddenly afraid.

He had good cause. Ichida and Kawase, who had paused at the far end of their beat, had recognized him.

What would they do? Neither had moved as yet.

Don't let anything stop me now, Davies prayed. *I've prepared for this. I've got the stuff to do it. I've only been waiting for the right thing.*

He understood the policemen's uncertainty. If they attempted to arrest him, the military guards would refuse to recognize their authority. Neither of the two guards would take up the end of the coffin which the supposed pariah was carrying, under any circumstances. Nor could the policemen follow the cortege and, after the burial, take the "Ainu" back with them; they dared not leave their beat. Yet Ichida would not give up easily. His monkey-curiosity had been aroused; the *udon* vendor "Koropok," he must feel, was certainly making trouble for him, and Ichida had warned him against just that.

Then both of the policemen were walking over to the guard at the rear of the somber procession.

He's thought of something, Davies knew. *What? I must be ready for it.* He had no notion as to what it might be, but his heart was pounding.

THE soldier to whom Ichida was speaking shouted the order for the carriers to stop; the guard ahead came running back. Police and guards conferred; Lew could hear nothing of what they said.

As the cold increased, the wind was fading. While Davies waited, he guessed that it was continuing south. Formosa. Manila. How long it was since he had left! The islands beyond. What was happening there . . . and what was happening here, behind him? And what could he do about it?

All four uniformed men walked up toward him. Ichida's gun was out. To Davies' surprise, he, an Ainu, was not greeted with the usual blows. As a matter of fact the guards stood a distance away from him.

Ichida's left hand held an electric torch. The Japanese turned it full on the vendor's face. Davies blinked under the beam.

"You see?" said Ichida.

Both soldiers shuddered.

"*Raibyo-yami,*" Ichida said. "A leper. Examine his face."

Wind and cold had ripped at the raw, burned skin of Davies' cheek until it might well have been caused by what the wily policeman claimed.

Davies' heart missed several beats.

One of the guards muttered, "*We* did not touch him. Another dog shall take his end of the coffin. We ourselves will take turns at the coffin which that other dog was previously carrying. *Ai!* What a terrible thing!"

Ichida purred, "Be positive to have a policeman bring that Ainu who takes his place to a station. The second Ainu also will be unclean, since his hands will be on the coffin where the first dog touched it."

"We will see to it," both guards promised.

Ichida, blown up with the importance of having given orders to soldiers, said sharply, "Do not forget!"

"Oh, no!"

"Good." Ichida snarled at Davies, "Put down that coffin. Come with us." And the Japanese licked his thin lips as he gave the command.

Davies thought, *I've got no choice;* but he had more in mind than Ichida could have believed possible for any pariah to be thinking. Lew lowered the coffin as gently as he could, and stepped out of line.

Ichida was on his left, Kawase on his right. The thin officer began to whistle an obscene Yoshiwara song. . . .

The Japanese was in high good humor. He had apprehended an Ainu who should have been selling *udon;* he would be praised and possibly rewarded and promoted for his alertness. He would also be permitted a hand in whatever was done to the pariah before the Ainu "Koropok" was imprisoned . . . which would be plenty.

Davies knew that the two guards would say nothing of what had happened unless questioned by their superiors, which could happen only if Ichida turned in a report stating the actual occurrence. This wasn't going to happen, Davies found out soon, because Ichida slapped him again and again, squarely on the wound, proving that the leprosy tale was pure invention designed to get "Koropok" away from the soldiers. Ichida's story would be that the Ainu had been roaming the streets in a suspicious manner and without his apparatus. The nervous Japanese authorities, already keyed up by the action of the military in killing Ainu after the raid on Paramushiru, would do the rest.

"*Fugo-jiru no,*" whistled Ichida, strutting along. Sheer exuberance compelled him to trip his prisoner. He kicked the *keto-jin*, the hairy one, several times before ordering him to stand up.

"If he were an *Amerika-jin,*" Ichida confided to Kawase, "I would kick him to death. It would be very pleasant."

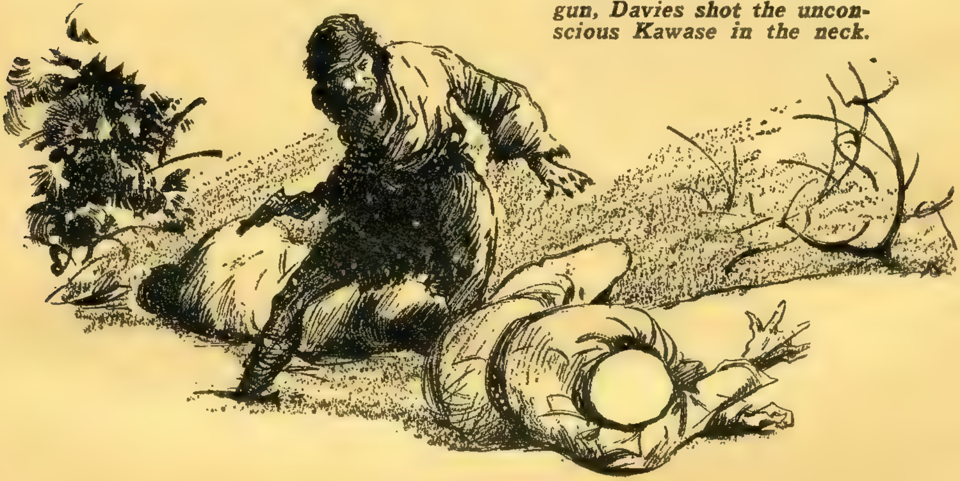
Davies shambled along between the policemen. He knew the way to the station, knew the streets, knew that his captors would cut across the black, shrub-filled park with its shrine. . . .

He weighed the future.

First of all, he must go back and get his cooking things. It was far too late to do anything tonight. He would sleep a little after he had returned to the pariah village; he would do his checking on temples during the day, as he peddled, and by tomorrow night he would be ready. He had prepared for tomorrow night. He had done everything possible; but nothing he had done, or would do, seemed half as courageous to him as the manner in which the American prisoners had marched off, heads high, lips firm.

Of course, if he had been caught earlier it would have been different. For example, when he had paid a true Ainu, several times, to handle prisoners' bodies at the camp hospital, just so he could learn where emergency anesthetics were kept; he had managed that well. He grinned a little now as, head down, he entered the park between the officers. If he had been caught stealing the little can of ether, he would have been killed on the spot, although he was positive that no one who had a hand in his death would have had the slightest idea why he wanted the liquid.

After he was dead, the Japanese would have said, "An Ainu will steal anything which he thinks will make him drunk. It is regrettable that we killed him so rapidly. We should have poured the ether down his throat."



Quickly picking up Ishida's gun, Davies shot the unconscious Kawase in the neck.

Davies had hidden the little can in the pariah village.

IN THE park, where the only light, shielded from the sky, glowed dimly under the shrine's lacquered eaves, was black as a pit until Ichida flashed his electric torch. The broad main path was empty. There were no sacred nightly processions now; fear of American bombing had put an end to such earlier jubilation. No longer did scarlet-robed Shinto priests, faces painted, lips reddened, eyes darkened with kohl, walk in boastful glory at the head of thousands of Nipponese. Nor did victory-mad raw recruits, after an evening with girls in the Yoshiwara, sleep off their drunkenness in the bushes.

Ichida's beam of light pried inquiringly from side to side and ahead, at rock gardens and rock-bordered pools where ugly giant whiskered carp lay motionless on the bottom. Ice was forming on the water's edge.

Shambling along like the animal which the Japanese believed an Ainu to be, Lew waited patiently until the shrine was passed.

Then, coldly and with the precision of a machine, he swung his right fist against Ichida's jaw. Everything he had went into the punch. He whirled as Ichida went down; he had both arms around Kawase before the policeman could so much as reach for his gun, and flung him to the ground.

Davies' throttling hands were like steel clamps on the Japanese' throat, and they tightened until the officer went limp.

Without haste, cold as the night, Davies covered the butt of Kawase's gun with the tattered cloth of his own Ainu jacket. He placed the muzzle against Ichida's jaw, where he had struck him, and pulled the trigger.

The sound of the discharge was enormous. Sacred crows, worshipped as messengers of the sun-goddess, flapped up from their nightly perches around the shrine, invisible evil shapes in the black night.

Davies now took Ichida's gun, handled it in the same manner, and shot the unconscious Kawase in the neck. He did this so swiftly that the sound of the second discharge hammered into the echo of the first.

The raucous cries of the crows grew louder.

Davies placed each gun-butt back in the hand of the policeman to whom it had belonged.

He was grinning grimly as he thought, *A cute little variation of Nip suicide. Two persons believe that they have been disgraced. They make a suicide pact: You kill me and I'll kill you.* Which was how the authorities would figure it.

Without hurrying, Davies began retracing his steps, one hand brushing against the bushes to his left to make sure that he wouldn't pass the stone lantern which marked the side path. Thanks to Ichida's beam of light, Lew had been able to mark the way he intended to leave the park.

Every pair of excited Japanese policemen within earshot were already converging on the park, but Davies was unworried. In true and nervous Japanese fashion, they would warn him of their approach by their flashlights.

By morning the account of the "suicide-deaths" would be on every lip. Gossip would ultimately concentrate on one story, which would run like wildfire through Tokyo. Davies did not believe that the two soldiers assigned to guard the Ainu body-carriers would speak of their particular belief to anyone. Firstly, to do so would be to invite trouble, because they themselves had not noticed the "leper." Secondly, before they had marched a hundred feet both of them would resent having been ordered about by a member of the police. Thirdly, they would solemnly tell themselves that they had better obey the Japanese army regulation: "Let your officers do all talking and thinking for you."

Their guess would be that in some way the policemen had touched or been touched by the supposed leper. Whereupon the policemen had, by pact, each killed the other rather than suffer a terrible living death. As to the unfortunate pariah who had taken "Koropok's" place at the end of the coffin, it was a certainty he was dead by now, and probably had been tumbled into one of the graves already prepared for the Americans who had died on shipboard.

The guards would report that the pariah had "resisted."

Once, twice, three times Lew slipped between bushes and lay on the freezing ground until Japanese police, always paired, converged on the shrine above which the crows flapped and cawed. At last he cleared the park, found a narrow street and, now hiding behind a bamboo fence, now dodging into a doorway, finally was able to reclaim his cooking apparatus, staff and lantern.

It was not long before he had the charcoal glowing, before the weird cry of *"Na-be-yaaas-ki-udooon!"* wailed in the streets again. But it was after four in the morning before he reached the silent pariah village.

No amount of will power could keep his teeth from chattering after he crept into the ragged newspaper-stuffed quilts in the hut where he lived with six other Ainu. *I'll never get warm enough to sleep,* thought Lew. *And I've got to sleep. I have a day ahead of me.*

Lord, but it was cold!

He wished he dared making positive that the little can of ether was safe, but if he did so, some hungry Ainu might observe him, to see if "Koropok" might have a hidden handful of mouldy millet or a fat brown bottle of *sake*. So Davies tried to roll himself tighter in his quilts.

Sleep refused to come. Doubts, induced by his very physical ill-being, began to assail him. Would what he had planned so long and held in reserve until the proper time, really work? It was based on solid engineering talk which had come out of a bull-session in the States, when he had been at an airplane plant. It had seemed such a beautifully simple method of raising hell with production that he had remembered it. . .

Get to sleep, he told himself.

But sleep did not come easily for the gaunt man who had been playing the part of a pariah. He thought of home. Sleep came hard.

* * *

"KOROPOK" was kicked out of his quilts at eight in the morning by the police. It was more than routine inspection. However, to Davies' initial satisfaction, it did not concern itself with the deaths of two policemen, nor with the wound on his cheek, but only with the insolence of an Ainu body-carrier. Because of it, as a lesson to the Ainu here, five men were to be "tried."

Davies knew all about such trials. He cursed himself for having returned to the village and slept, instead of securing his little can of ether and departing immediately.

The pariahs, men and women alike, were arranged in lines between which Japanese officials strode, selecting the strongest-appearing of the Ainu to take for a torture-trial and death. Davies was in the third line. Would he be picked? He wouldn't mind dying, after he'd made his attempt. That would be O.K. But to be knocked on the head like an ox. . .

That's how it should be, Lew decided. *If I let 'em know who I am and what I have been doing, just for the pleasure of sounding off and getting shot instead of being tortured, I'll make it that much tougher for some other fellow who might follow me. If I go, it'll have to be as Koropok.*

He appeared as cowed as the others.

Then, eyes on the earth as the officials approached, he heard, "This one is young." A hand pulled him out of line. "Your name, Ainu?"

Davies mumbled, "Koropok."

I could kill one Nip with his own gun, thought Lew. *Maybe two. Why not? I'll be a dead duck anyhow.*

He kept his eyes on the frozen earth, but his muscles tightened.

"He looks simple," Davies heard a different voice say. He let his shoulders droop more abjectly. "Surely we can do better?"

"They are all simple," the first voice remarked. After laughter, he continued, "Suit yourself, Kodzuke-*san*. Let us find another one."

Kodzuke Yotsuye. The minor official who had signed his permit, whose *geta* he had mended without pay.

Shot with luck, realized Davies. *He sees a chance to milk me dryer.*

When five pariahs were driven off to "trial," sad old Ainu elders began whittling five sticks. These would be thrust into the ground, and would represent the spirits of dead men. The Ainu knew what would happen.

Davies waited until the settlement went back to shiver in the hovels; then he took the river-path, dug up his ether can, placed it in the charm-bag fastened to his skin belt, and started for the city proper.

His cooking apparatus was slung over his shoulder. The pots banged against his thighs. Lieutenant Llewelyn Davies.

Checking on the shrine which the American prisoner must have meant was easier than Davies had anticipated. His first feeling was correct; it was Funkagawa. He really knew this before he reached it, because there were food stands in the district where war workers could eat, far more than were needed by the residents, who depended on vendors anyhow.

Funkagawa. To the shrine, at night, during *Kanchu,* the season of the midst of cold, came hundreds of worshippers, all carrying lanterns. There were other spots to which the Japanese came, but here, if one prayed, was assured protection against fire; and what greater thing was there to fear now that American warplanes were being awaited in terror? This was the place.

Davies did not need to go near the food stands to learn what was being manufactured in the underground plant. Aircraft. His eyes told him what was taken to the factory, and what was trucked away. What he did pick up from a boastful charcoal stallkeeper was that a new warplane was being made, and one which would keep up the nightly bombings which were taking place in America as everyone knew. Yes, great destruction was being caused in America.

The plant itself was well concealed. One entrance was set between houses at the edge of the shrine courtyard; another appeared only as a tree-bordered path. How Intelligence had learned of the plant was not Davies' worry; what concerned him was the location of the intake for the air compressor which created the pressure for riveting. Whether the air lines inside were overhead or under the floor would make no difference. The intake, once Davies determined the outer limitations of the underground plant, was easily found.

It was unguarded; the Japanese knew that no man could crawl through such a small opening. But, at night, when no one could see him. . . .

He shuffled off, not returning toward the shrine until eight.

The cold caused every split place on bamboo fences to crackle; it was truly *Kanchu,* the midst of cold. Everywhere, as Davies shambled in the direction of the shrine and the warplane plant hidden near it, there was the sound of hundreds of little bells carried by the *kammairi,* the worshippers.

Each carried a long paper lantern with his name painted on it. Everyone was clad in white, heads bound about by white handkerchiefs, feet covered with white *tabi,* socks. And, as in ancient times, the worshippers ran, the sooner to reach the shrine, the better to keep warm.

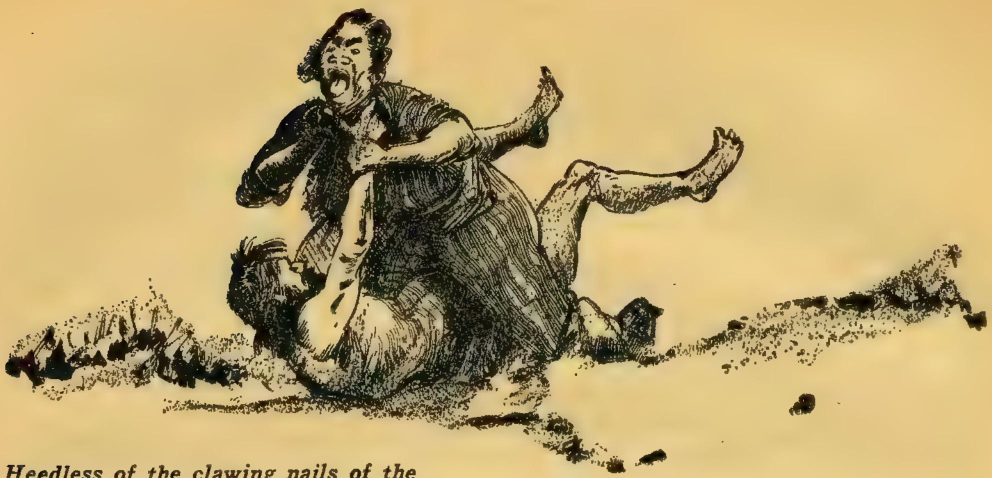
Davies was shoved this way and that and cursed for being in the way, as the *kammairi,* the women with hair unbound, raced toward the shrine.

They're all intent on purification and prayers, thought Lew. *It couldn't be better. It ought to be in the bag.*

BLACK night and ghostly runners with their bells and lanterns. Pinpoints of pale yellow light where stallkeepers served those *kammairi* who had completed a long prayer to the temple-god to protect them from the great and terrible American warplanes. The crowded doorway to a teahouse inside of which *amazake,* a beverage made of fermented yeast, was boiled in great pots to warm the chilled Japanese. And now and again a hurrying truck, taking parts of planes from the underground factory to an assembly plant.

And the cold. Always the cold.

Davies, moving with the throng, knew where he was going, exactly how to get there, and what to do. If he was cursed for blocking the way of the *kammairi* who ran so much more rapidly than he shambled, he did not mind. If he was spat upon, he wiped away the spittle as humbly as any pariah.



Heedless of the clawing nails of the pimply-faced hakoya, *Davies grasped him by the throat and throttled him.*

To the left of the shrine was the hall of purification, to which the worshippers first went; and as Davis shuffled past it he could see naked brown bodies of men and women ladling warmed water over themselves just as he ladled hot *udon* out of his pots. After purification, they would bow down at the shrine. In such manner they were made sufficiently pure to address the gods.

He passed the shrine itself, now walking near a row of food stands. Which jealous proprietor first screamed at him, he never knew. But in no time at all a hostile crowd gathered about him, and his little sack of dough was pulled away from him.

What he heard next, as the Japanese jeered at him, turned him doubly cold. An old Japanese, in white like the others, was speaking.

"When I was young," stated the wrinkled old man, "such a thing as this would not have been tolerated! *Ai!* When I was young, things were different. No pariah dog would have been permitted to walk here—"

"Nor take money away from honest stallkeepers," yelled the Japanese who had called the crowd's attention to the "Ainu."

"And we," the ancient announced, "would have worshipped properly! In those days we were not called *kammairi.* No. We were known as *hadakamairi,* naked worshippers, and that is what we were. We ran honorably naked to the shrine, which is now forbidden by the authorities. We did not shrink from the cold winds—"

"Force the Ainu to become a dog-*hadakamairi,*" shouted the stallkeeper, seeing a way to stop completely any coins going to the *udon*-vendor. "Oh, how enjoyable it would be to see him run!"

A burly, white-clad Japanese had Davies by the arm.

Voices pleaded, "Please, no. It is forbidden."

"Should pariah dogs wear clothing?" yelled the big Japanese, smelling excitement and fun. "Is not his own hair sufficient covering, even on a night of great cold? Surely not even the police would object to a dog being chased away from a sacred place, and this dog"— he hit Davies furiously on the ugly wound—"is a mangy one at that!"

The stallkeepers now all egged the tormentor on.

The "Ainu" was hurled to the ground. Hands ripped off his tattered jacket and trousers, his blackened socks. The skin girdle defied rough jerks; as the burly Japanese' hands went for the thong fastening, he saw the real despair on the face of the throng's prey. Connecting this truly enough with the girdle and the charm-bag which was tied to it, the big

Japanese howled gleefully, "O dog of an Ainu, you can keep it if you lick my hand!"

On hands and knees, Davies did it.

Then he was kicked to his feet, spat at, slapped.

"Run, mangy dog! Run!"

The audience squealed with delight. Nothing like this had ever been seen before. Oh, how the dog ran! And he ran in circles, too, without sufficient intelligence to take the shortest route away from his tormentors. This way and that he ran, with the threats of the men and, worse poison, the shrill venom of the women, in his ears. The Japanese buzzed about him like wasps.

He appeared to be blundering aimlessly, but was not; he wanted the Japanese to have their fun here, and not harry him through the streets and far away from the shrine. Once he was chased off, he would never be allowed to return. Soon he began to gasp, and bets were made as to how long he could remain on his feet. At the end, as if completely exhausted, he stumbled and fell headlong against a stunted pine's rough trunk, at the edge of the courtyard.

While the mob goggled down at him, cold started to seep through his skin. But the Japanese finally left him, all except a penniless *hakoya*, a Yoshiwara attendant who, after the others had gone for hot *amazake* at the teahouse, knelt beside the motionless naked body.

DAVIES was rolled to his back by the pimply *hakoya.* The Japanese' eager fingers found the charm-bag, in which he hoped to find a few coins; and then, heedless of the *hakoya's* clawing nails, Davies throttled him.

Luck again. *But if I put on his clothes,* thought Lew, almost before the *hakoya* was dead, *I take a chance at being caught for wearing 'em.* If he were caught later, it wouldn't matter so much. Not after he'd done his job. *Come on, you bathing beauty,* Davies goaded himself. *Get going, Mr. Tokyo.*

He removed the *hakoya's* clothing, rolled it into a bundle. Then, ears alert for any returning Japanese, he crept off. Several times he flattened himself, with the clothing flung to one side where it couldn't be seen, until the Japanese who stopped and stared down continued on their way. Once he lay as if unconscious, but all he had seen was a stone lantern.

It seemed as if he could hear the tiny bells ringing all of the time. By now almost all feeling had gone from his feet. On hands and knees, shaking with cold, he examined the distance ahead which he must travel.

He had to make a dash for it. He had to take that chance in the black night. The cold was taking away control of his muscles.

There was no one to slap him on the back. No one to say, "Let's give 'em hell, boy." No one. Not even a fellow-prisoner. Not anyone.

But, as he knelt on the ground, fumbling to get the little can of ether out of the charm-bag, he felt like what he truly was. An American. A soldier. A duty had been assigned to him and, so help him God, he would carry out his orders.

He stood up and ran. He could only tell when his feet struck the ground by the pain which shot up his legs. But he ran.

The air intake for the underground plant's air lines . . . where? Oh, where? Here! Right here. Now, unscrew the can's cap. Stuck. Damn! Fingers don't want to hang on to the tin. Fingers no good. Damn fingers! Cap . . . ought to come off easily. Did when tried before. Maybe the cold. . . .

It took Davies' teeth to grind the cap from the can.

He flung the contents through the wire-covered intake. For a fraction of time he heard only the ringing in his ears, part real, part imaginary, while the smell of ether further dizzied him. That moment of waiting was the longest Llewelyn Davies had ever experienced in his life.

Wouldn't it work? Were the States engineers all wrong? Wouldn't the piston of the compressor, squeezing down on ether instead of on air, blow the whole set of lines inside all to hell—and everything else with it?

Had he failed?

Then he heard a sobbing sound. Not

loud. Like the exhaled breath of the pimply *hakoya*, just before he died. A sob. At the air intake.

It grew, clattered, became metallic; and then it screamed like tortured metal. Sounds like nothing Davies had ever heard before followed hard on the new shrill noise from below, from inside the plant where a secret Japanese warplane was being fabricated. It was metal crashing against metal as the air lines exploded. It was ruin. It was the most wonderful, beautiful sound Davies could imagine.

"What do you know?" said Lew Davies right out loud. "What do you know?"

If workmen were screaming in the underground plant, the noise of destruction kept their shouts from Davies. What they were shrieking was "Fire! Fire!" because flying pieces of metal, in addition to the havoc which Davies expected, had ripped down electric power lines also, and not all the earlier prayers at the shrine could stop the swift spreading of the flames.

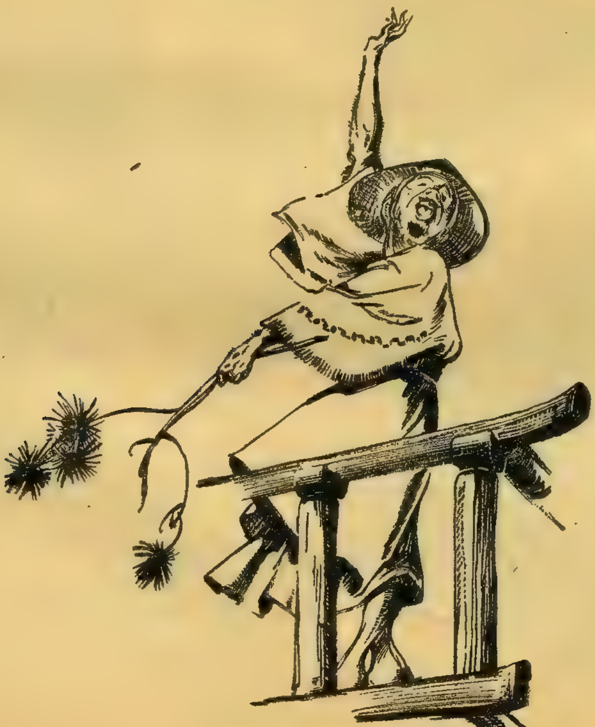
Davies had forgotten how cold he was. Without knowing it, he stood straight as he listened to the magnificent sounds. He wished he dared wait until the Nips came swarming out of the plant, running as they must have run from American bombs at Paramushiru. It would have been swell to watch. But a fellow always had to have something keeping him from having fun.

He pulled on the Japanese attire, covering his skin belt and charm-bag with it. He must keep out of sight until he reached the pariah village.

Grinning, he waited a second longer, hearing the tumult, seeing the bobbing lanterns. He thought that he smelled smoke, and that he saw smoke swirl out of an entrance, but that was too much to hope for.

Then, with what he believed was strictly a G. I. stride, Lieutenant Davies marched off. Actually, he was limping, although he didn't know it.

Everything was fine. Everything. It was a little cold, but you had to expect such weather at this time of the year.

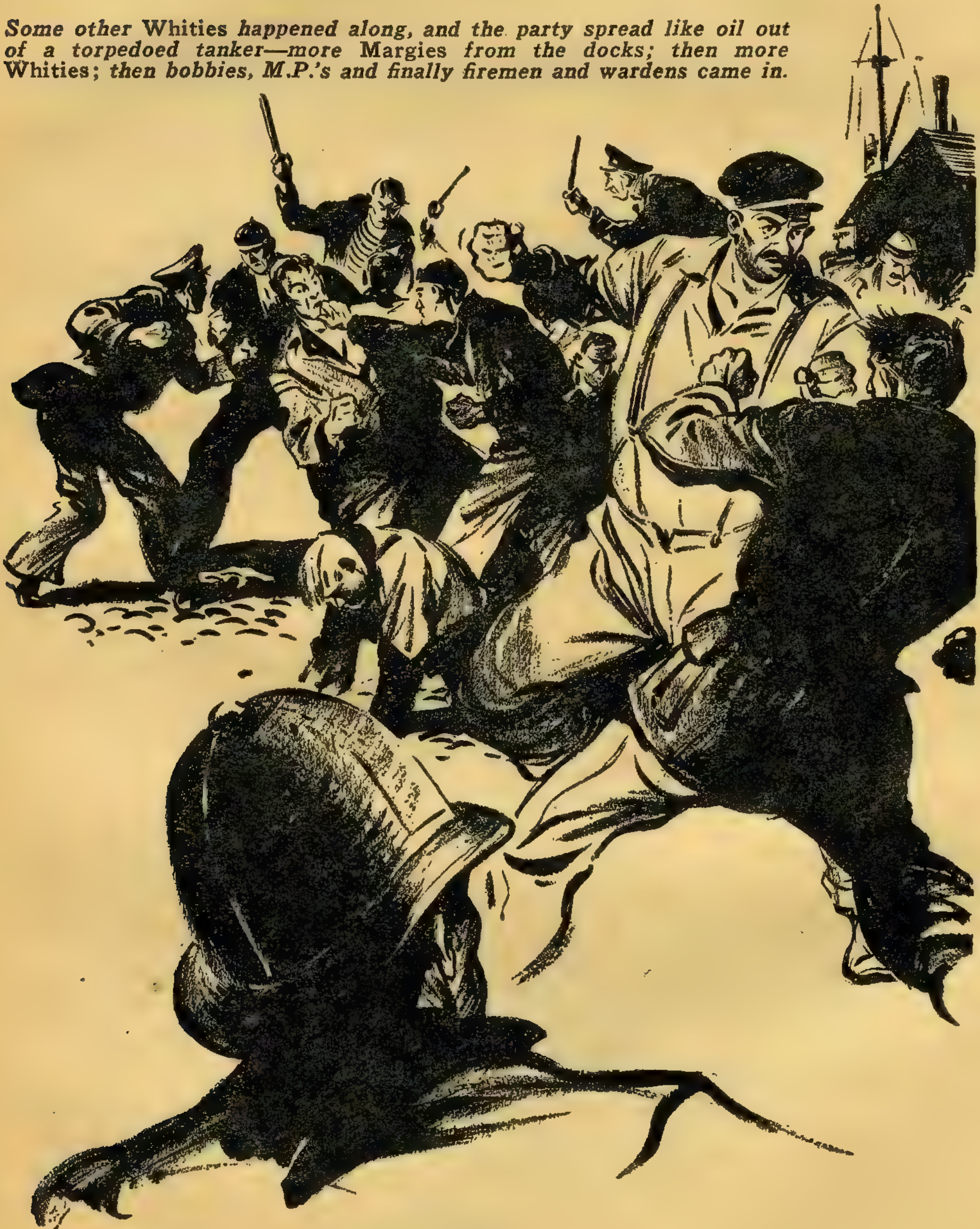


COURT SHIP

By

RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Some other Whities *happened along, and the party spread like oil out of a torpedoed tanker—more* Margies *from the docks; then more* Whities; *then bobbies, M.P.'s and finally firemen and wardens came in.*



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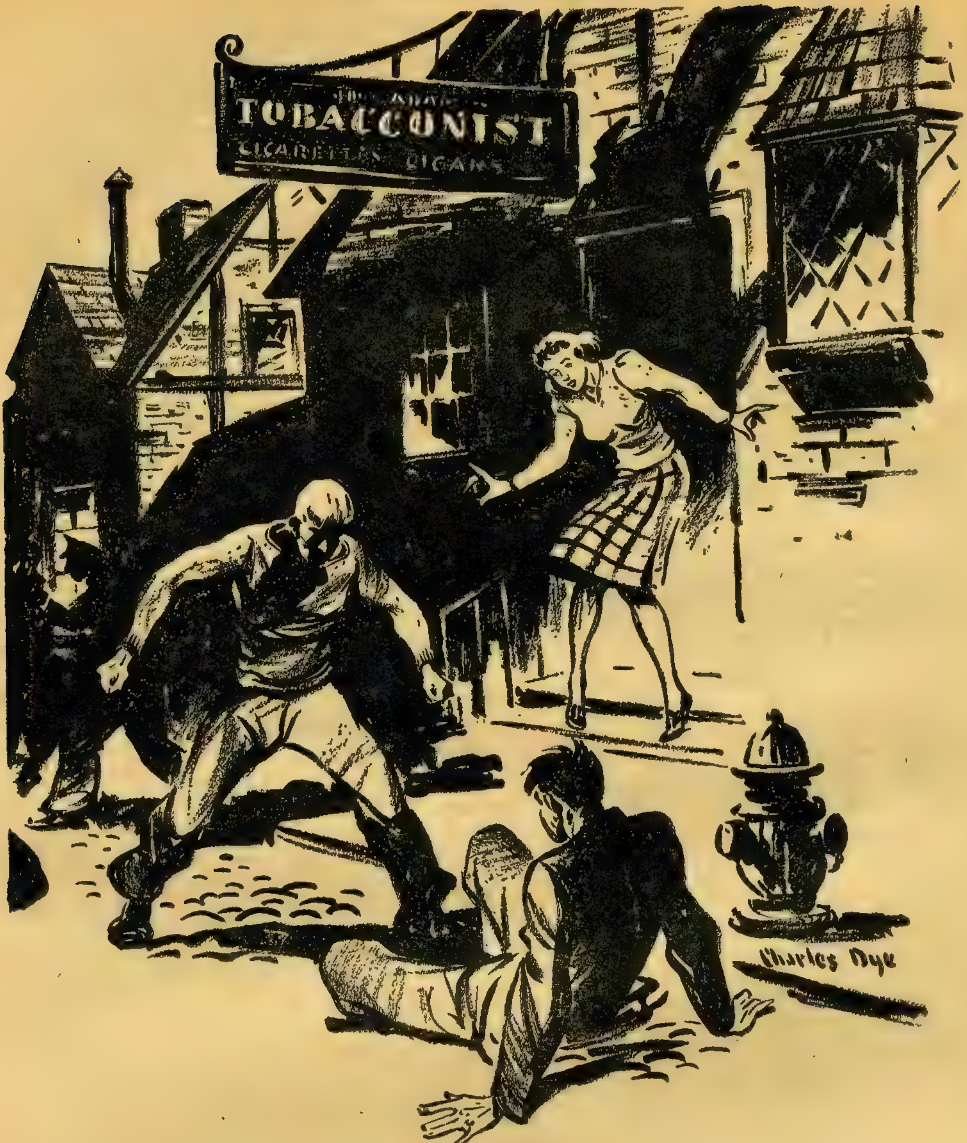


WE WERE running east. The fog was so thick you had to stand sideways. And this *White Crane* blundered out of position.

How do I know it was her, not us? Well, I'm a *Margie,* aren't I? Sure, she lost the ship ahead. She wandered over to starboard and sideswiped the *Margaret Blackenham.*

Nothing exciting. We just ground rivets together, port to starboard, till the sides smoked. You could smell the paint burning.

We had some stuff in us that wasn't amiable about being shoved around. Before the two helmsmen were able to sheer the ships apart there was chat over the bulwarks about seamanship and facial oddities, crew to crew, while we waited to see if anything in Number Five hold let go. But nothing happened. She didn't even dent a plate for us.

Where was William Potter, mess attendant for the deck gang? Down in the galley putting a shine on Cookie's pots, with Cookie standing by to see that he did Cookie's work for him. But that started it.

The day after we landed at an unknown British port some other *Margies* spotted William Potter listening in front of a tobacconist's shop, which is their name for a cigar store, located within easy walking distance of a waterfront pub. He was listening hard, with his eyes switching around in his head, as if looking for an exit.

The guy he was listening to was Pit Lewis, off the *Whitney*. Pit, a big Welsh A.B. from Pennsylvania, was excited. His fists were as jumpy as William's eyes. "Never, look you, never!" he kept saying and the "never" was about William sticking his graphically described puss within a hundred feet of the beautiful Rosemary 'Arris, the tobacconist's shop assistant. Rosemary—her mother was French and Rosemary had snapping black eyes and silky black hair from her—was a smooth proposition. In the last four months she'd given many a seaman in that port besides Pit Lewis a case of smoker's heart.

Pit was just about set to hammer William Potter's face down into his chest.

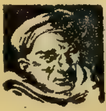
"Put up your dukes, man!" he howled at William.

In the *Margie*, William was lower than a cockroach's poor relation and he'd never scraped up a pal of his own. But he was a *Margie*. That was how our bosun, Pop Gormley, saw it. He threw in his lip right away.

"How about that sideswipe in the fog?" Pop Gormley asked Lewis. "Sure, that proves that a messman in the *Margie* is more of a man and a seaman than a whole watch of A.B.'s in a lubber's paradise like the *White Crane*."

Swoosh! Pit Lewis dived in, fists first. His dukes weren't any softer than the chunks of anthracite he used to mine in Pennsylvania. But Pop had a granite mug. It was quite a "swarry," as Rosemary's ma's friends would say back in France. She came to the door and watched, clasping her hands dramatic-like instead of calling for a hobby. She put on quite an act.

Some other *Whities* happened along, and the party spread like oil out of a torpedoed tanker. More *Margies* from the docks; then more *Whities*. Then bobbies, M.P.'s and finally firemen and wardens. You could see they didn't think it was polite to break up a swell scrap like that but they had to do it and they fixed it so nobody got pinched.



"NOTHING but another sideswipe," Pop Gormley said, walking back to the ship. "Always barring Pit's left swing to me teeth. I took that one bows on."

That evening Jeff Knight, our mate, took a long hard look at William Potter. Did I say this Potter, though gawky, was good looking, with curly brown hair? It was the curl that decided Jeff Knight. He'd once been cut out by a lad with curls. His long and knife-edged nose twitched a little, like a rabbit scenting lettuce from afar. He'd used up all bettors in the *Margie*.

Jeff Knight sauntered ashore, waylaid the second mate of the *White Crane* in a bar parlor, appealed to his sporting blood and his loyalty to his ship and eloquently put the bite on him for fifteen dollars, at evens. William Potter to land Rosemary, the beautiful tobacconist's shop assistant, in holy wedlock before Pit Lewis and fists. If some dark horse married Rosemary the bet was off.

Fresh from that triumph, Jeff Knight steps aboard us to find Cookie, the second cook, chaperoning William Potter with a frying pan. The mate's entry, the whole six feet of him, was down on the galley floor swabbing it up, mighty humble.

"Isn't that your job?" Jeff asked Cookie.

"Made for it, he is, sir," Cookie said. "He hasn't got the spirit of a left-handed guinea pig. Swillyam Potter, I call him, for he's handy to handle my garbage. Look at his face—the only unmarked mug that came through the dock gates after that waltz with the *Whities*."

Jeff looked. It was true. Jeff fitted wings onto his fifteen bucks. William Potter kept on swabbing the deck. He could give Cookie twenty pounds and three inches of reach but Cookie had a twist in his tail. Being homely himself Cookie hated 'em handsome.

Jeff Knight woke me up and tried to sell me half of his bet.

"Not even in a nightmare," I told him.

Now I'm not saying that Jeff Knight would sell his soul to the devil to win a fifteen dollar bet. But don't let's talk about twenty. Anyhow, he was an agonized man. All the westbound run you could fairly see the man whipping his brain like I once saw Etienne Arnaud, our inspired steward, sail into a bowl of cream with an eggbeater. All the while Cookie tongue-lashed William Potter all over the ship, harnessed him to his own job, and lived soft.

It was a queer run with nothing to break the monotony but a westerly buster that nearly shook the engines out of her.

Jeff Knight didn't quit. He borrowed a book from Sparks about how to develop a masterful personality and went for Potter, to rebuild the guy. You'd see 'em by the lee rail on the well deck, with Mr. Knight pumping go-git-it into him with both hands waving and William pleating his cap around with his fingers and suffering humbly. The minute the mate would quit, exhausted, Cookie would slide up behind William and send him off like an overdue rocket. Other hands got to riding him, too.

"He looks like his own grandfather and jumps like a glory-hole flea," I told old Hauser, the first assistant engineer. "Rosemary wouldn't have him for a slavey."

Pretty desperate, Jeff Knight tried to rope the whole ship's company into making a man out of William Potter and helping him win the tobacconist's beautiful shop girl for the glory of the ship. But nobody bit. Not with Jeff Knight in it. Of course Cap'n Seth Cobb and Mr. MacDuin, our Scottish chief engineer fra' the braes o' Brooklyn, got steamed up to an argument about William Potter. But even they weren't excited about how sad it was that Pit Lewis of the *Whitey* was pinching his girl.

There was a little friction between the two ships at an unknown, and rightly so, Canadian port, but nothing that a few days and a piece of raw beefsteak wouldn't cure. Then we were off again in the same convoy with the *Whitey*.

"Bound east again except your fifteen bucks," I said to Jeff Knight. "That's going west." I'm good at cracks.

WE WERE shoving on well past the half way mark. The forenoon watch—mine. Commodore cussing the convoy—he says it with flags—convoy cussing the commodore—without flags—commodore and convoy cussing the naval escort and double that in reverse, with loudspeakers. Everything serene and normal. Low gray clouds and a left-over gray swell from a nor'wester coming in on the port quarter. Why don't they ever send us to Algeria or some place where the sea gets blue instead of your face?

Don't ask me how this Focke Kurier plane spotted us. Probably a hole in the gray dirt. Anyhow, he came gliding down out of the lower edge of the clouds and started laying eggs with more haste than accuracy. It was unexpected. *Wham! Whoosh! Wham!*

Before the destroyer outside us got a gun on him Fritzie had dropped 'em all, scoring perfect misses. He opened up his machine guns and motors. He headed right over us. "Hard left!" Cap'n Cobb was yelling to the quartermaster. "Gun crews! Hit him!"

There was no chance of our getting in a zig before he was past, flying low for Germany. And then the *White Crane*, off on our port beam, opened up with an A.A. gun. The first in the convoy.

For just a tick of time the Old Man looked pleased about it. Then a screaming shell from the *Whitey* burnt past his left ear. He tried a dive to shelter through the bridge planking. The planks just held. He flattened out while more shells felt for him. Me, too, though the sight of my commander making a racing dive without benefit of water nearly paralyzed my protective instincts.

The Kurier veered and the *Whitey's* ack ack gun followed it, ranging aft over us. Mr. MacDuin, who'd been surveying the wake with a proprietorial air, ducked so fast he left his trim watch cap suspended. I think I saw a shell go right between the cap and MacDuin's southbound head.

The cap bounced and fell into Pop Gormley's pot of red lead. Dark and bluidy sounds from Mr. MacDuin, who has an ancestral heritage of that stuff. It's not learning; it's instinct.

The real quick thinking was done by Jeff Knight. He came zooming up from the well deck the instant the gun lifted its aim. He had his binoculars in his hands.

"D'you know who's firing at us, sir?" he yelled above the roar of our guns at the flat Old Man. He pointed toward the *Whitey*. "That's Pit Lewis at that gun—the fellow that's trying to steal poor Potter's girl!"

"Sink Potter and damn his girl!" Cap'n Cobb roared, or words to that effect. He got up I couldn't help looking at the planking. He hadn't dented it. But the Old Man's dignity was in ruins. His nose wasn't much better.

"Condemn Potter and burn his girl!" he said. He turned flaming eyes on the *White Crane,* near hot enough to touch off her cargo. "What the—what's that you said?"

"Pit Lewis, sir, behind that gun," the mate said. He had fifteen dollars' worth of moral indignation in his voice. "The man who made a mock of this ship by stealing Potter's girl and attacking our crew ashore. Sort of vengeful, isn't he?"

Mr. MacDuin was coming forward, in a dense black silence, now. He had his cap by the visor. He silently exhibited it to all. He had paid guid siller for it himself, and now it was a red horror beyond benefit of turpentine. His furry black eyebrows, like two loops of crepe over his eyes, mourned his loss. It was a tense moment.

I forgot. The Kurier went bending off into the low clouds with the whole convoy chucking steel at it. They tell me pieces fell off it and that it is difficult to fly a plane back to Germany without all the pieces. But we were busy with our own taut situation. The Old Man was still looking toward the *Whitey* and after another brooding glance at his cap MacDuin looked, too.

"Pit Lewis—who's stealing poor Potter's girl," Jeff Knight stuck in again.

"So that corkscrew-eyed barber's clerk with the trembling trigger finger fancies himself as a ladies' man, does he?" the Old Man said. "Well, by heck and jingle, I'll—"

"Ye may be right," MacDuin said reluctantly. From MacDuin that was revolutionary.

And then the convoy commodore put in his nickel's worth. Signal flags fluttered up above the bridge of the old liner.

"What's that hoist?" the Old Man said to me. I got busy with the glasses and the book. I hardly dared tell him.

"Sir," I said, sort of nervous. "The commodore makes the signal, 'Well done, *White Crane.*' "

IT LOOKED as if the Old Man would spatter. It was a close thing. But he didn't. He just stood there, tearing handfuls of whiskers out of his chin. He is a clean-shaven man, himself, but you get the idea.

"S-send Potter up here," he said.

"On the bridge, sir?"

"Send him up!"

Jeff Knight hovered in the background, protecting his interests with a large hunk of silence.

Potter came up. His big brown eyes were switching around in his head. Cap'n Cobb pinned him flat against the rail with a stabbing glance. You know how it is. The Old Man had to take some sort of action or let go at all the seams.

"Potter," he said, "what were you doing while your ship was in action against the enemy?"

"Cleaning out a saucepan for the second cook, sir," said Potter.

"Exactly!" said the Old Man. "Precisely!"

MacDuin shook his head despondently.

Cap'n Cobb waved his fist in Potter's face. "It's about time you learned, young man, that membership in my crew demands a standard of manhood and resolution that you have failed utterly to attain. What the double-dealing dickens do you mean by cleaning out a saucepan for Cookie while your opposite number —as far as this girl is concerned—is operating, however insanely, an A.A. gun?"

William tried for a breath but didn't make it.

The Old Man kept on shaking his fist. "You'll prove yourself worthy of this ship, young man, by taking over this girl from that club-headed lubber—his name is Spit Lewis, you say, Mr. Knight—or you'll—you'll do it, Potter! Understand? I want men in my ship!"

He took another look at the commodore's signal: "Well done, *White Crane*."

"You'll march in with your chest out and make a monkey out of this Lewis ape before that girl and the world. Take her by storm! Manhood, muscles, braggadocio, if necessary—"

"Now there ye're wrong, Captain Cobb," said MacDuin. The crustiness of his Scotch made plain that he was far, far from Brooklyn, back among his ancestors and glens getting set to swat his foemen with a claymore. "Ye're deid wrang the noo. With the curl in his hair and the brown of his een he'd melt the wee lassie lang ere he'd storm her."

"Don't try to tell me anything about women!" said the Old Man. "I say he's to storm her. You forget your position in my ship, Mr. MacDuin."

" 'Tisna possible, or willingly I would," said the chief. "I say tae ye, Captain, that Potter must woo the lassie, saft as—"

And so on. These two were back to normal again.

But William Potter wasn't happy. He scuttled off the bridge. But before he hit the well deck we *Margies* were split solidly into two parties. The Old Man's followers were the Stormoviks and the chief's the Saft Soapers. I was a Saft Soaper, myself, not seeing William in any Gargantua role. Jeff Knight was as neutral as a cat that's swiped a pint of cream. He didn't care how William won her, as long as he had all hands on the ship making it plain to William that he'd better win.

I never figured the mate's fifteen bucks was really safe, at that—not after the interview I had with young William about the tobacconist's beautiful shop assistant.

"Brace up," I said. "Get set to woo in a big way. Believe me, Potter, this girl is no passing fancy in your life."

He juggled his mittens. Other guys were waiting to speak to him. "No, sir?" he said.

"Your passing will be real fancy if you don't get her," I said.

"Pit Lewis is a tough—"

"Scared of him?"

"Yes, sir."

I shook my head. Maybe William was showing moral courage to admit it but he didn't look it. "I haven't got a nickel on you, Potter," I said. "But being a third mate I'm all for the downtrodden. Miss out on this and downtrodden it is, with boots on. I know an aroused ship. You ought to love that girl like sweet life itself."

"Poetry, sir?" he asked, uneasy.

"Inside information," I said. "Pit is only a drop in the bucket to you."

WILLIAM flattened his ears. I saw a balky mule do that once on a South American run. The chief mate, who regarded him as just cargo, didn't walk for three weeks. But while William's ears were still back Cookie came by. Never beautiful, Cookie had a look on his face. William crash-dived into the working alleyway.

Cookie smiled. It was worse on my eyes. He jerked a thumb as thick as a cruller after the mess attendant.

"I found a book on seamanship in Swillyam's bunks," he said. "But I'm going to teach him new methods of galley pearl diving."

From being the loneliest galoot on the North Atlantic, William became the busiest in the next couple of days. Some said that the Saft Soapers gave him more trouble—I mean courting advice—than the Stormoviks. But I ran into William more often in the toils of a Stormovik, backed against the rail with advice pouring over him.

I saw Gregory, MacDuin's second assistant, showing William a clutch up on the boat deck that was calculated to bring love into any girl's heart if her ribs could take it.

"And don't give her a chance to get her breath," Gregory said. As if she'd have a chance.

Pop Gormley, the boatswain, demonstrated his own technique at impressing 'em. Chiefly it seemed to be pounding his hairy chest with his hairy fists, dancing around in a circle and making passes with what looked like an imaginary hatchet.

"I always thought the bosun was Irish," the second mate said to me, "but Indian blood seems to bubble up in him when love calls."

Most of 'em, though, just talked. William's breast-bone looked like the woodpeckers had got at it, from where Stormoviks had emphasized important points with their fingers.

Probably Etienne Arnaud, our steward, had the best dope of all us Saft Soapers. The trouble was that when he'd really get going about l'amour he'd switch to fast French. That didn't make him useful to our side. He was better for William, though, than old man Hauser. The first assistant did a duet with himself, first being the ardent young man and then the coy girl, four days' gray stubble on his leather face and all. Him doing a maidenly bridle and drawing back in timid confusion was enough to stop both chronometers.

Quite a voyage. I never saw a kid so exhausted as William Potter. And of course a difference of opinion about love would crop up now and then among the hands.

"A guy without cuts on his knuckles don't look like a *Margie* at all," Jeff Knight said to me, pretty complacent. They were all working for him.

"Save yer hands for the shore, boys," said Pop Gormley, with a swing of the fist toward the *Whitey*, to port.

Every evening around submarine time most of the hands would line up along the port rail. They'd look wistfully across at the *White Crane*, toward the man who had flattened out our Old Man on his own bridge planking and pinched the sweetheart of one of our mates. The *Whitey's* gang got the habit of looking back.

Cap'n Cobb saw what was due to happen and took a hand. "I won't have any fighting with this war on," he said. "I shall refuse shore leave to all but Potter who—ah—has business ashore."

He ran his eyes around on us. "H'm. Of course Potter may require a little counsel in the vigorous prosecution of his suit. Mr. Leet, you will accompany him."

"Me, sir?" I said. I wasn't sure I wanted to play second fiddle in a messman's wooing, with a bunch of hard cases like the *Whities* forbidding the bans. I'm brave but not suicidal.

"You," said Cap'n Cobb. "I look for happy results, Mr. Leet."

You could tell that the cussed old wart was still feeling how that bridge planking had kissed his face.

"I'll lend you my brass knucks," Jeff Knight whispered.

A GOOD two hours after the *White Crane* had docked we slung our own heaving lines. The Old Man made me and William walk the plank at once. Across the dock from us the *Whities*, or the bulk of them, were watching. Their Old Man had them in hand, too. But I didn't see Pit Lewis. They gave us a jeer we heard above the clatter of winches already lifting out her cargo.

Outside the dock gates William made a pass with his feet in the wrong direction. He was shivering.

"Belay that!" I said to him, very tough. "D'you think the *Margies* rigged you out like a commodore's clerk to have you go skittering away from your girl? Bear off to starboard."

He did it, but not so cheery.

"I don't want to—" he started.

"Think of the girl, not Pit Lewis," I told him. "You've got to save the *Margies'* faces if you get your own caved in doing it. Keep rolling those big brown eyes at her while they're still blown."

As we came toward the tobacconist's shop I spotted one of those tall little taxicabs they have. And next second Rosemary 'Arris, dolled up like Cleopatra's dream, came out of the shop on the arm of Pit Lewis. The *Whities* had him dressed up even more lurid and disconnected than William. There was meditated matrimony in every inch of him. And right behind them walked Mr. Shaw, the *White Crane's* second mate, the man on the other end of Jeff Knight's fifteen dollar bet. All three of 'em popped into the taxi at the curb.

I gave a yelp and shoved William Potter toward another cab. He was hard to move. But at that we beat out a little Englishman in a bowler hat—derby to you—who came scuttling out of a doorway toward that same taxi.

"Join the bridal procession," I told the cabby, pointing to Pit's cab.

"Right, guv'ner," he said and got going. But he moved up on them too fast. Pit Lewis looked out the back window. And he spotted us. He started folding up his features into a mighty venomous mug.

"We're too late," William said, sort of chattering. "Let's stop."

I didn't even answer him. I was trying to think up something bright in the action line.

We didn't run far. But as the cab ahead slowed down I saw we were passing a registry office—what we'd call a marriage license bureau and municipal altar. Of a sudden Pit's cab swung into an alley just beyond it. Before I could stop our driver he'd made the turn, too, and brought up behind Pit's cab.

Pit was already out. He jumped for our cab, wrenched open the door and jerked William out. He was showing William all the teeth the mining business and his disposition had left him.

"You'll make a grand best man after I've pounded you down to size, lad," he said. "If you can best me, boy, you can 'ave 'er."

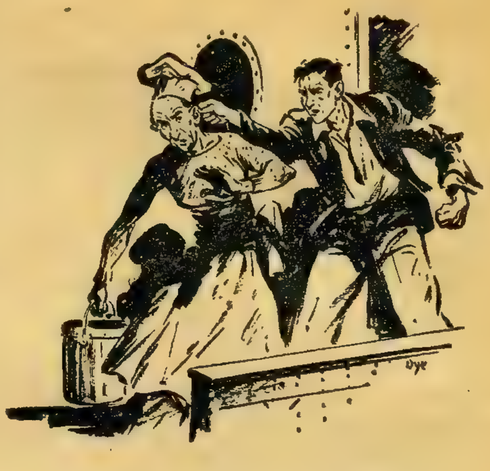
" 'Ere!" said Rosemary, out the cab window. "I won't 'ave it, Pit! Bartering me abaht like a chattel! 'Aven't I any modesty don't you think?"

Mr. Shaw of the *Whitey* ranged alongside me. "We are officers and gentlemen," he said, showing me the heavy end of a stainless steel marlin spike he happened to have in his coat pocket. "Pit and Rosemary arranged about the license last voyage. Besides, we don't interfere ashore with the pleasures of men before the mast. Or do we?"

He was a powerfully built guy, beside the spike.

"We don't," I said.

"Don't be long, Pit, dear," Rosemary said, sticking her head out the cab window.



Cookie was carrying a bucket of swill and William was steering Cookie over to the rail by his ear.

Pit wasn't losing any time. In spite of the confines of the alley he spread himself about William. For perhaps two seconds I had a hope. Pit's first shot to William's jaw didn't flatten him and he got back a nice right-handed swing to the side of Pit's face. But after that William quit cold. It was all Pit, all the way. He plastered William with fists, right-handers, left-handers, jabs, crosses —everything in the book. And all William did was to block a few.

Right in the middle of it I caught a glimpse of the little limey in the bowler hat that had tried for our cab. He was peeking down the alley at us. Rosemary was still in the cab, doing something technical to her face with a mirror.

PIT put William down on his back with an old-fashioned uppercut.

"Had enough?" Pit asked, grinning down at him.

"Plenty," William muttered.

I was disgusted. He hadn't taken enough to crawl.

"Willing to stand up with us?"

"Sure," said William. He climbed to his feet. He stood there, looking at his fist, while Pit got Rosemary out of the cab. Then he paraded his bride and his best man around the corner toward the registry office, shoving them through a growing crowd. Mr. Shaw was looking at me. I had my orders to stick to William and I did.

The registry man did his stuff, with William standing by in a trance. Shaw was watching me pretty closely. He was a mind reader, not a second mate. But what could I do? I had six bright ideas to uphold the honor of the *Margie* all tangled up into one big knot. I was mighty low.

The man got them all married. And then who should step up to the bride but this little Englishman in the bowler hat.

"Rosemary Harris," he said, "I am a detective inspector. I place you under arrest for the crime of bigamy. It is my duty to inform you that anything you say may be taken down and used in evidence against you."

"What?" said Pit.

Rosemary tried for the inspector's eye with her finger. Not a nice girl, at all, and she let go with some French that was probably pretty lively stuff if you understood it.

But the inspector had a couple of men up his sleeve in the hall and Rosemary got refined again, fast.

"I regret this, gentlemen," the inspector said to us, with an eye on Pit. "But I had a job to do. Rosemary Harris is married to Thomas Meader, a lad on a West Indian run. Also to Eric Phelps, a tank driver in Tunisia and to Robert Elwyn, an aircraftsman stationed in Syria. She is drawing a married woman's allowance and part of the pay of each of them. Makes a business of it. This latest ceremony will enable us to stop this without bringing home men who—"

I couldn't help letting go a mild shout. Had we *Margies* hung one on the Whities! But William was on his way out.

"Let this teach you not to play with matches," I said to Shaw of the *White Crane*. "Or with marlin spikes."

I wanted to get that news back to the *Margie* fast, even if I had to go in the company of a quitter like William. But I was surprised to see him climb quickly into the taxicab and tell the driver to hurry.

"Your bacon's been saved for you," I said to him, pretty curt. "You're full and down with luck but I wish you'd thrown more than one punch for your ship's sake if not for your own."

He nodded sort of dreamily. Already he was back in his trance. I didn't get him at all.

We hustled through the dock gates. As I headed up the gangplank toward a mass of faces William started trying to climb over me. He was in a bigger hurry than I was.

I stopped dead, blocking the gangway. "Don't figure you're a hero, Potter," I said. "You quit cold. And don't you forget it!"

"Let me get aboard, sir," he said. A queer face he had on him, sort of lighted up inside. He slipped past me, bolted up the gangway and shoved through the crowd out of my sight.

I didn't care what alibi he'd worked out. I had big news. I broke it to all hands on the well deck that the *White Crane* had been deceived. Practically bigamists, the lot of them. Every mother's son of the *Margie* cut loose. They acted as if they'd done something bright for their ship. They certainly whooped it up.

They got the news across to the *Whitey* without the bearer being killed.

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of Adventure, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1943. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Harold S. Goldsmith, who having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Adventure, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Editor, Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owner is: Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Henry Steeger, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y., Harold S. Goldsmith, 205 East 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner, and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. Harold S. Goldsmith, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of September 1943. Eva M. Walker, Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 18, Register's No. 4W359. (My commission expires March 30, 1944.) [Seal]—Form 3526—Ed. 1933.

A fast man on his feet, that messenger, and shifty. The *Whities* were real irritable.

But I had a bad taste in my mouth in spite of everything. That worm, William Potter.

HALF an hour after I'd come aboard the Old Man strolled out of his cabin onto the bridge. He smiled, nearly benignly, at Mr. MacDuin. And the chief nodded, nearly amiably. Then he lifted a horny finger to point aloft.

Up on the signal halliard was fluttering a hoist of flags. The Old Man didn't need a code book to read that signal. He'd seen it before that voyage.

"Well done, *White Crane!*" said MacDuin.

The Old Man choked. He hustled back into his cabin so he wouldn't have to order it down.

For the sake of future business, Jeff Knight was pretending to enjoy the joke. But he didn't pretend to me.

"That Shaw will collect," he said. "Pit married her. D'y'ever hear of a joke worth fifteen bucks?"

"No, I never—wait!" I said.

I was staring incredulously down at the main deck.

William Potter was down there. The clothes contributed by the *Margies* were in ragged ruins on him. His knuckles were badly shot. One of his big brown eyes was closed as tightly as his right fist.

Cookie was with him, carrying a bucket of swill. And William was steering Cookie to the rail by a grip on his ear. Once Cookie had dumped it William let go his ear. He missed Cookie with his foot. Cookie was moving too fast for sure aim.

William looked up and saw me. He grinned, though it couldn't have been good for his shuffled face. He came to the foot of the ladder.

"Till Pit got me in that alley I thought it was him I was afraid of, sir," he said. "But it wasn't. It was Rosemary. There was something snaky about her, fascinating but—"

I stopped him. "In that alley it wasn't Rosemary you were taking it from and not handing it back."

He laughed. "D'you think I'd run the risk of knocking out Pit and winning her?"

He pointed to himself. "Maybe I'm no great fighter but I know now I can stand up to the worst licking any man in this ship can give me. And I'm getting a job as seaman even if I have to sign in Pit's watch in the *White Crane.*"

I nodded and looked at Jeff Knight.

"That's worth fifteen bucks of any man's money," I said. "The kid's onto himself."

I headed for the Old Man's office to sell him an able seaman.

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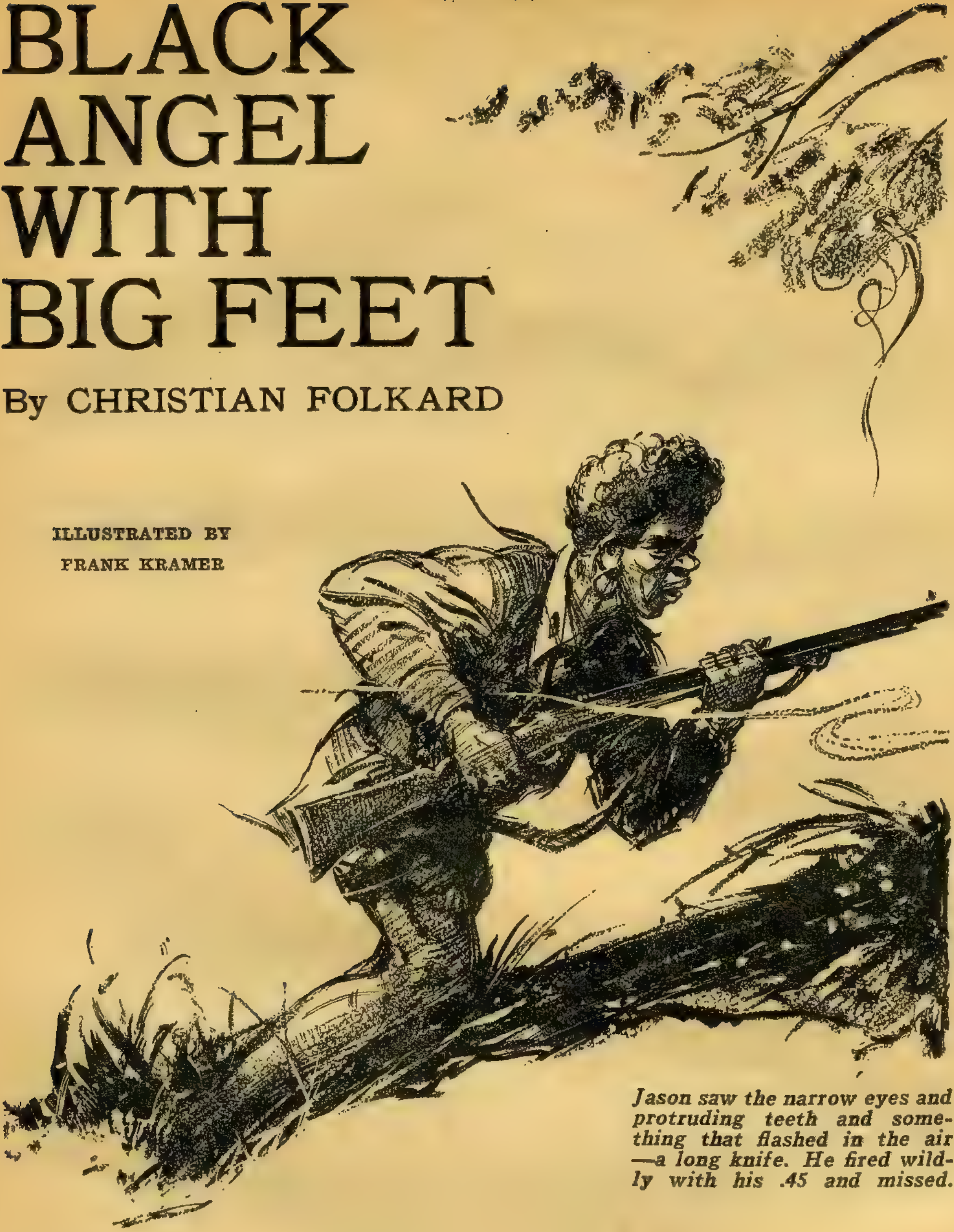
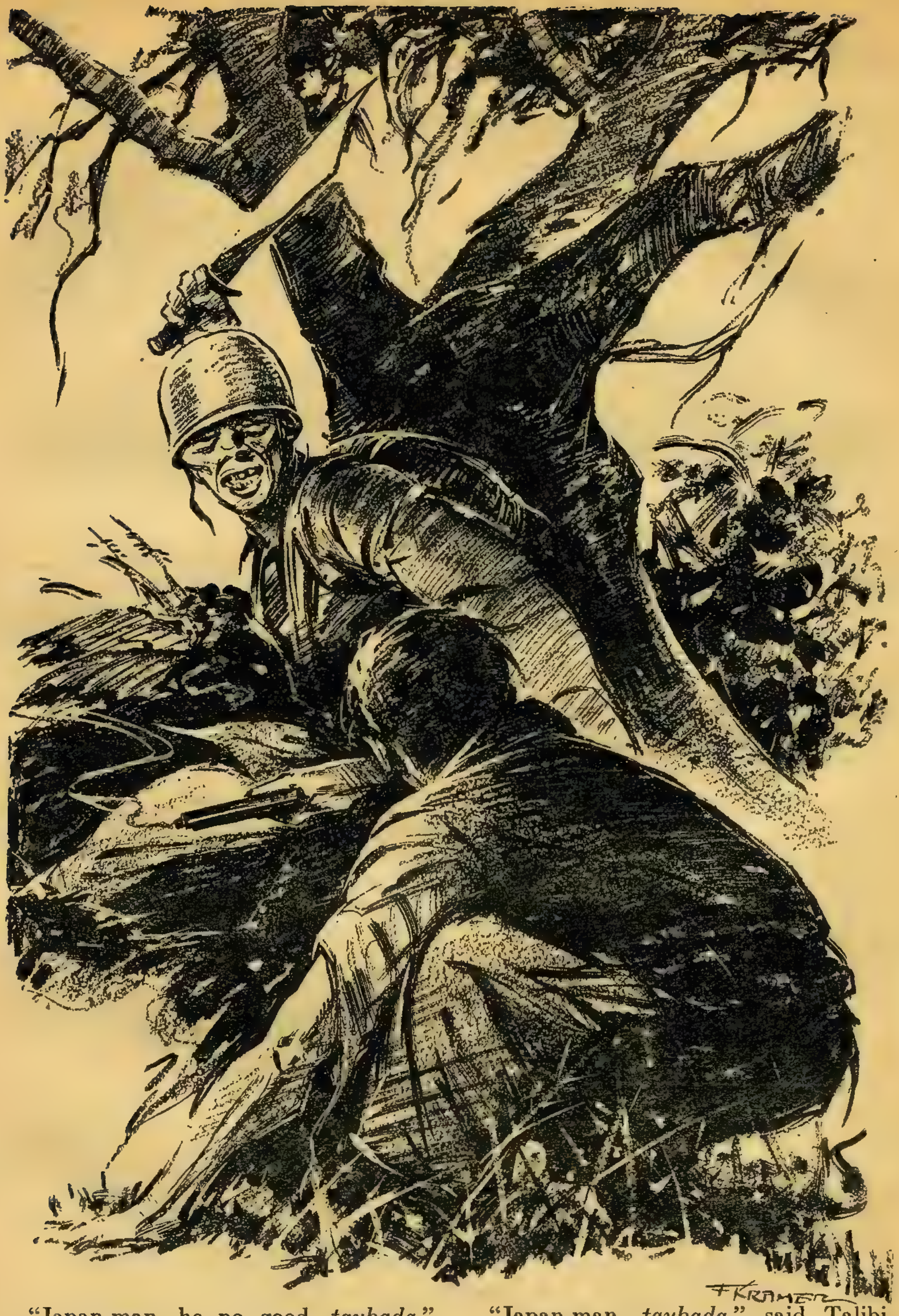


Jason saw the narrow eyes and protruding teeth and something that flashed in the air—a long knife. He fired wildly with his .45 and missed.

THE slap of a hand on wood swung Captain Eric Wynter around and there was Sergeant Talibi, of the Papuan Infantry Battalion, standing stiff as a totem-pole. The hand was still on the rifle butt, the fuzzy head thrown back, the heels together and the huge, bare feet splayed.

"Ho, *taubada,*" sang Sergeant Talibi. He swelled his chest under the dark blue, round-necked flannel shirt with the edging of maroon, the red rami and wide leather belt adding color, if not regimental dignity, to his dress.

Captain Wynter saluted. He said, "What time you bring belonga me?"



"Japan-man, he no good, *taubada,*" said Talibi, still stiff at attention. "No good, *taubada*. I catchem onetime."

"O.K. What you catchem onetime?"

"Japan-man, *taubada,*" said Talibi. He grounded his rifle butt—one, two, three—about-turned with parade ground precision and pulled on a length of lawyer-vine tied to the back of his belt. Ten yards away, the bushes parted and into the open shuffled a yellow skeleton of a man dressed in filthy, ragged clothing.

"Japan-man, *taubada,*" said Talibi, proudly.

The Japanese, five feet three inches of bones, sunken cheeks and frightened eyes, stood, half-bowed in submission. His wrists were tied behind with the vine. He was completely beaten.

"'Ten-shun!" roared Talibi, and somehow the yellow man pulled himself to the upright.

"Well," said Captain Wynter. He saw that the big eyes of the native burned with pride and his bearing was that of a conqueror extraordinary. Even the thick lips parted in a smile, showing the betel-stained teeth beneath. "Well."

"Bigtime Japan-man, *taubada.* Three stars here." He pointed to his chest. "Now prisoner big pfella gub'mint."

The Jap certainly did not look "big-time." He looked more like a garbage-can cur. But Captain Wynter did what was expected. He said, "Fine work, Sergeant. Take your prisoner to the guardroom. You've done your duty well."

Talibi saluted again and the pride burned brighter in his eyes. Then, "Man from air, he safe, too, *taubada.*"

"What? What man from air?"

Talibi gave the suggestion of a grin but nothing more to show his pleasure at taking the captain by surprise. He waved one hand and then jerked its thumb towards the ground—which, to Eric Wynter, meant a plane flying and crashing.

"He not hurt, *taubada.* Sound as a bell. First time, I put him alonga hospital."

"Very good, Talibi," the captain said. "I shall see him. In the meantime, carry out your orders."

More saluting, more slaps on the rifle butt and the Japanese was jerked about like a marionette. And he looked like one, dangling on the end of the split vine.

Before he reached the hospital, Wynter was met by an excited doctor, fat and perspiring, who called, "He's all right. All he wants is rest and a good feed."

Captain Eric Wynter, of the Australian New Guinea Administration Unit, said, satirically, "That's fine! Now I know everything. The whole picture is clear. Who the hell's all right and why?"

"Jason's the name," said the doctor, excitedly. "He was an American B25 pilot. You know—the one with the twin tail. Well, the Japs got him over Buna. Talibi picked him up near Sangara Mission and brought him here."

Wynter whistled because that meant Talibi had brought him clear through the enemy lines—from Sangara, through Popendetta, across the Wairopi River, up through Kokoda and Isurava and Eora Creek. And dragging a prisoner, as well. No wonder the black devil had that look in his eye!

"Take a peek," said Doctor George Evans, handing him a small calico wrapping. "Talibi gave them to me to mind."

Inside were six—no, seven—of the insignia of rank that Japanese soldiers wear on their shirts. Stars on backgrounds of silver and red. Wynter recognized only one: the three stars designating a first-class private.

"Where in the hell did he get these?"

"Seems he was running a sort of one-man punitive expedition," Evans said. "He reckons he killed them all and he wants these sewn on his shirt like a Portuguese admiral. But I'll tell you something funny. See this one with three stars? Well, Talibi tells me he was on parade in Moresby once and who comes up but an American lieutenant-general with three stars on his shoulder. So Talibi captures this Jap and what does he have on his shirt but three stars. So he says—"

"I know," said Wynter. "He told me the same—'big-time Japan-man.' General, nix—private, first class. But good old Talibi!"

The native huts, of saplings thatched with long *kunai* grass, formed the hospital. Men coming back from the front, now north of Templeton's Crossing, had their dressings renewed here before they went on their way, slowly and tortuously, to the roadbed at Alola and the jeeps. Those too sick or wounded to walk were carried on blanket stretchers by four natives, up and down the steep, muddy valleys of the Owen Stanleys, across flooding creeks, through storms and heat and a journey so long that many died.

Inside the hut, Wynter saw the American, bearded face, matted hair, smeared and torn clothing, lying on a stretcher. His uniform clung and the bones showed through. He was strong enough to crack a smile and shake hands when Evans said, "Lieutenant Jason. This is Captain Wynter. He's in charge of the natives around here."

"Take it easy, old man," Wynter said.

"I'm all right, thanks. Honest I am. Where's Talibi? You've got to look after Talibi . . . Did you ever read that verse one of your Aussie soldiers wrote? 'The Fuzzy-Wuzzy Angels of the Owen Stanley Range?' That's him. That's him all over."

"Sure," said Captain Wynter. "That's right. You'd better get some sleep."

"But I'm not going to sleep. I'm not going to sleep till I tell the story. Because maybe I won't wake up. And Talibi, he can't speak enough English. I've got to tell it for him."

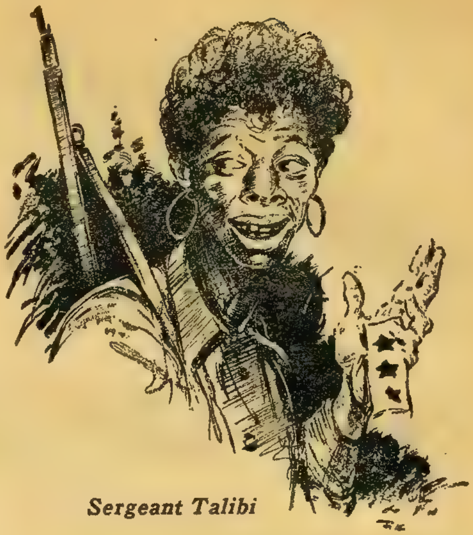
Wynter looked at Evans and back at the American. He wasn't delirious, just tired out, and to let him talk might be a safety-valve for the tension inside. The eyes were pretty bright, though. He'd gone through a hard time.

"O.K., Jason," Wynter said. "Maybe it's an idea." He pushed some blankets under the American's head. "But don't overdo it."

THE bombardier called through the inter-communication that he'd scored a direct on the Japanese transport off Buna and the tail-gunner yelled, "She's afire. Smoking like hell!"

Jason looked down. She was certainly smoking. Black clouds billowed up from the decks and there was a spurt of flame. But he thought, "It's an old stunt of the Nips. They put barrels of bitumen on the decks, set 'em alight during a raid and all the planes go home happy that the ship'll sink."

He said through the phones, "We'll just slip down and make sure." They came close to the vessel. The air suddenly became filled with tracers and black puffs of smoke. The plane bucked and Jason yelled, "Geez! We're hit!" and got to hell out of it.



Sergeant Talibi

He climbed to five thousand and put the Mitchell into a steep dive, hoping to put the flames out, but she still burned from the port engine and tail.

The gunners held the fire in check for a time, but it spread and when they came to the control-room door, Jason yelled, "O.K., boys! You'd better jump." He said the same through the phone to the bombardier and waved a cheerful farewell as he saw him clamber up from his glass cage. Then, to the man at his side, "I'll keep her straight until you get off. O.K., make it snappy!"

"What about you?"

"I'll go through the emergency. Give you three minutes."

He sat, very much alone, at the controls and counted the seconds methodically. The Mitchell was lumbering along, losing height steadily. Long strips of jagged flame leapt from the engine. She was still answering to the controls. He set them, stood on the seat and pushed against the emergency exit in the roof. It wouldn't budge.

He pushed until the sweat ran down his face and nerve tingles ran over his body. He swore first, then prayed and from a corner of his eye he watched the flames around the engine growing larger and larger.

He caught hold of himself and moved his lips to say, "All right, then. I'll go through the bomb-bay."

Every movement seemed to take an eternity. The plane was racing to destruction and there he was, clumsy and slow as a tortoise. He flung open the control-room door and something warm and solid leapt at him. There was noise and heat and confusion and Jason felt himself jerked off his feet, up and up until he hit something that held fast and then gave.

Jason closed his eyes, opened them speculatively, fearfully. He was suspended in the air and around him were dropping pieces of metal and fabric and then something like a blazing comet which he recognized as the twin tail of the B25.

Nothing became quite clear until he hit the top of a tree, unhooked his parachute and climbed down. He was sweating now, not with the heat but with relief. He sat in the mud, leaned against a treetrunk and said slowly, to make sure he could understand his own voice, "It was opening the door. Everything must have been bottled up. Then the whole damn thing exploded and I was the battering ram that opened the emergency. For Pete's sake . . ."

There were cuts on his arms and legs and face. He dressed them with sulfanilamide from his jungle kit and then studied the compass, which told him that Port Moresby was 100 miles away with 7000-foot mountains and the Japs in between.

He set off to walk south. As if teasing, the jungle let him go for a while and then closed in. Jagged claws on lianas ripped his clothing and flesh. Lawyer-vines, tough as plaited manila, clutched and tripped him in the mud. Spikes on palms tore his hands.

Over all was a dreadful silence, a depressing lack of movement and life that made him feel no larger, no more important than an insect. The jungle stank of rotting vegetation and rolling miasmas revolted the stomach so that he retched and leaned against slimy trees for support.

His feet sank deep in the mud, so that every step was an individual effort. Some of the undergrowth was so thick he had to hack his way, foot by foot, with the jungle knife. At first, he cut methodically but, as the day wore on and progress was little, this system was replaced by wild slashing and he imagined he was fighting an enemy who grew new arms and legs every time they were cut off.

The forest was in perpetual twilight, the sun beating on the top of the thick cover of vines and trees and turning life into a vast sweatbox where every movement was an effort. Jason wanted to lie down and sleep, sleep forever, but he kept on. He forced his way through huge sago swamps, with warm, black mud up to his knees, sloshing and struggling, while the forest kept whispering to him, "*You'll never get through. Sleep here.*"

THE food wouldn't last long. Luscious-looking figs grew on the outside of shaggy trees. He bit them and spat out the bitter juice. He found on the ground fruit shaped and colored like apricots and peaches and plums but his teeth could not penetrate the woody surface. He tried queer-shaped nuts which looked appetizing but tasted worse than quinine. Nothing to eat and no life beyond myriads of butterflies and unseen birds who raucously croaked, "*Cryke-alow-crawwk! Cryke!*"

Time had no meaning and there was no escape from the afternoon rains that beat on the lofty jungle roof like a million rataplanning drums, so loud that he tried to sing to keep the noise from driving him mad. The rain, the mud, the unending struggle were even easier to bear than the depressing loneliness, the feeling that he was the last living man in this jungle and that the inanimate had taken control and was trying to kill him.

How long this lasted, he did not know. He could not count the darknesses that came with the rains. Then, he would huddle himself against the tree, thinking that the fireflies were cigarette ends of dancing couples and the glowing fungus window-lights of a friendly house . . .

Water dropping from leaf to leaf, the sound of a limb falling, became magnified into the noises of an advancing army. Only by a tremendous call on his sanity did he restrain himself from leaping to his feet and running.

He fell asleep, too weary to worry about the mosquitoes that covered his hands and face with a bloody cloth.

He rose next morning with bleary eyes and an aching body but some new strength. The jungle was becoming thinner and, for the first time, he found a track. He cried unashamedly with relief and followed it southwest for hours. It rose and tumbled over hills and across rock-strewn streams where he bathed and drank.

Now that the fight against the jungle seemed ended, the emptiness of his stomach became pain. Spots danced on the trail, every step left him weaker and he collapsed. When he awoke, he half saw, half sensed, white bandages on his legs and arms. Once again there was the jungle, but he was lying on soft leaves, not mud, and nearby was a large native in blue and red and with glowing eyes and a melting voice who said, "*Taubada, dohori.*" Jason turned the phrase over. "White master, wait a while—" And he fell asleep again.

The food was there when he awoke—a mass of green pawpaws, bananas and yams. He ate quickly, then slowly, and things came back to life. The big native was Sergeant Talibi, an angel with big feet.

They had a long way to go and the Japanese were scattered between them and the nearest known Allied positions. Japs were patrolling the jungle paths, devastating the native villages that dotted the verdant highlands. The silent jungle breathed danger now.

Talibi tended him like a gentle nurse. He renewed the bandages and fed him with messes of cooked vegetables and ripe pawpaws and tiny apricot-flavored bananas. For hours, he would squat on his heels, just watching Jason, ready to tend every need. Jason took as much new strength from him as he did from the food and the rest.

On the second day they were ready to move on.

At dawn, Talibi took his rifle and moved like a shadow into the jungle. Twice, Jason heard shots in the distance and, after a while, Talibi returning, grinning all over his large black face.

"Japan-man, he no good, *taubada.* I kill him." And he laid on the ground two Japanese insignia. "Shoot 'em quicktime," he said. "One, he eating coconut. Other, he sleeping. We go, *taubada.* Maybe Japan-man he come."

They walked through Higitura, flanked on either side by coffee plantations whose tiny white flowers overscented the air. They sucked sour *sepora,* the small native limes, and fed on coconuts and red bananas nine inches long and three inches thick.

Through Popendetta they went, and up the road towards the Wairopi River. Here, Talibi grew more cautious. He questioned the other natives, kicked them to get information and spat when he used their name. "*Orokaiva, las, taubada! Orokaiva,* they women. They work for Japs."

He learned that the Japanese were in force around the Wairopi. Talibi moved

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through the jungle, unseen, unheard and only the broad footprints with the splayed toes showing his passage. Jason would wait until he heard his signal, the *cre-o-eee!* of a bird, then he would follow the footprints. Thus they moved.

ONCE, Jason waited long for a bird-call and heard instead three shots and then a fusillade and he felt himself praying, not for himself, but for the black man. He crouched in the darkness of the jungle, very alone, hand on revolver and his heart beat fast and loud. But Talibi returned at nightfall, with a bleeding arm. Grinning, he bound it up, showed Jason some more enemy insignia and emptied fruit from a small string bag.

Laboriously, in a mixture of Motuan and pidgin, he explained how he had gone to a village and seen Japanese there being given fruit by the natives. He had hidden for hours and, as the Japanese, mostly unarmed, came out, he had waited for the last two, shot them and stolen the bag of fruit. The escort fired at him with a tommy-gun. A slug got his arm, but he kept on and, as an example to the natives not to help the enemy, he had demoralized them by his presence—all of them respected members of the P. I. B.—and fired the village.

They climbed slowly and cautiously into the heavier timber and open *kunai* patches of the country around Kokoda, where the air was cooler and the mosquitoes less fierce. Once, they were almost caught by a Jap patrol of ten.

Talibi, as usual, heard them first. He signaled in alarm and they dived into the bush, only a few feet from the track. As the enemy came in sight, Jason felt himself sweating and praying to himself, "Don't move. For God's sake, don't move." He thought one of the Japs looked straight into his eyes and his knees knocked violently. But the sun filtered through the trees and fell around him in a dappled carpet of camouflage. And then the Japs were gone and Talibi was grinning like a schoolboy after a slightly illegal adventure. Jason that night called out in his sleep and, when he awoke, Talibi was clumsily stroking his hand, as a mother would soothe a baby.

Jason was sitting just off the small clearing when he saw the Jap coming at him. Talibi was ahead, scouting. Jason fired with his .45 and the brown man squealed and pitched forward, then tried to throw a grenade, so the airman shot him again. The shots rang in his ears but now that he had seen death, he did not feel so afraid. He knew that the Japs would be around him soon, but to run into the jungle would be to lose Talibi—and to lose Talibi was the end of the journey.

He swung around and there was another Jap coming toward him. He saw the narrow eyes and the protruding teeth and something that flashed in the air—a long knife. He fired wildly and missed and there was a flurry movement and a cracking sound. Then Talibi was lifting the stunned Jap on to his shoulders and hissing, "Quicktime, *taubada*. Quicktime!"

They ran into the jungle, falling over vines and tripping against trees, and all around there seemed to be other noises and shots coming from a distance. From every bush, Jason expected to see Japanese emerge, and his breath came short and hard as they hurried on.

Talibi, as always, seemed unmoved by the adventure. His short, powerful legs never tired, though his black body became polished bright with sweat. The broad lips were parted in a smile of triumph, showing teeth stained black by betelnut and lime, which he constantly chewed, spitting out streams of blood-red juice.

When the Jap stirred and made faint noises, the native flung him roughly to the ground, cut a length of lawyer-vine and tied his wrists tight behind. Proudly, he ripped the three stars from the little man's shirt and more proudly displayed them to Jason.

"Big pfella," he said. "*Ohai!* Very big pfella. You know 'im three dots, eh? Big-time pfella!"

"Sure," Jason panted. "Sure. Good work, Talibi. But you can't carry him along."

But Talibi did. He treated his prisoner with complete contempt, butting him in the rear if he lagged, roaring at him in a ferocious-sounding tongue if he failed to understand orders. The Jap accepted his position and, after the first few hours, bowed and hissed at Talibi as though he were his superior officer. He looked exactly like the cartoons of Japanese that Jason had seen in the newspapers: the flat, almost featureless face with the narrow eyes, wide mouth and protruding teeth. He was no beauty.

It was doubtful if Talibi slept for the next three nights, he was so anxious to keep the prisoner in view. During the daylight hours, he tugged him up and down the steep slopes of the Owen Stanleys, up past Kokoda and Isurava and Eora Creek, stumbling and struggling against mud more slippery than ice. And, soon after the start of the fourth morning, they heard an Australian voice and saw they were surrounded by green-clad troops who had materialized as quietly as the mountain mists.

Talibi grinned hugely. He swung to attention, slapped his rifle butt and announced, "Sergeant Talibi, Papuan Infantry Battalion, reporting!" His smile knew no breadth when the Australians crowded around his prisoner. The Japanese rank badges on his breast quivered with righteous pride.

THAT was the story Captain Wynter heard. The last phrases stumbled a little. The American was nearing the end of his strength. He had not told the story for himself, but rather as some small repayment for what Talibi had done.

Wynter picked up the three-star badge of the Jap private and fingered it.

"You've got to do something for him," Jason said. "What can I do? Nothing I could give him would be—"

"No," said Wynter. "No. Nothing material would do." He looked out through the opening at the hazing hills and there standing in the clearing was Talibi, rifle at ease, huge splayed feet apart.

"Talibi!" he called.

"*Obi, taubada,*" sang the native and marched smartly inside. He blinked a little in the gloom, caught sight of Jason and split his face in a grin of pleasure.

Captain Wynter stood up and, as Talibi sprang to attention, said, "Sergeant, you have done a great thing, a thing of which the big man in Moresby will be proud. You have caught a Number One Japan-man *taubada,* him of the three stars."

"*Obi, taubada.*"

"This Japan-man, he very important fella, savvy? He big-time general. But you no tell you caught this Number One *taubada.* Japan-men, they no know. Japan-man, better 'im no know, savvy?"

The black man nodded his head and his eyes shone.

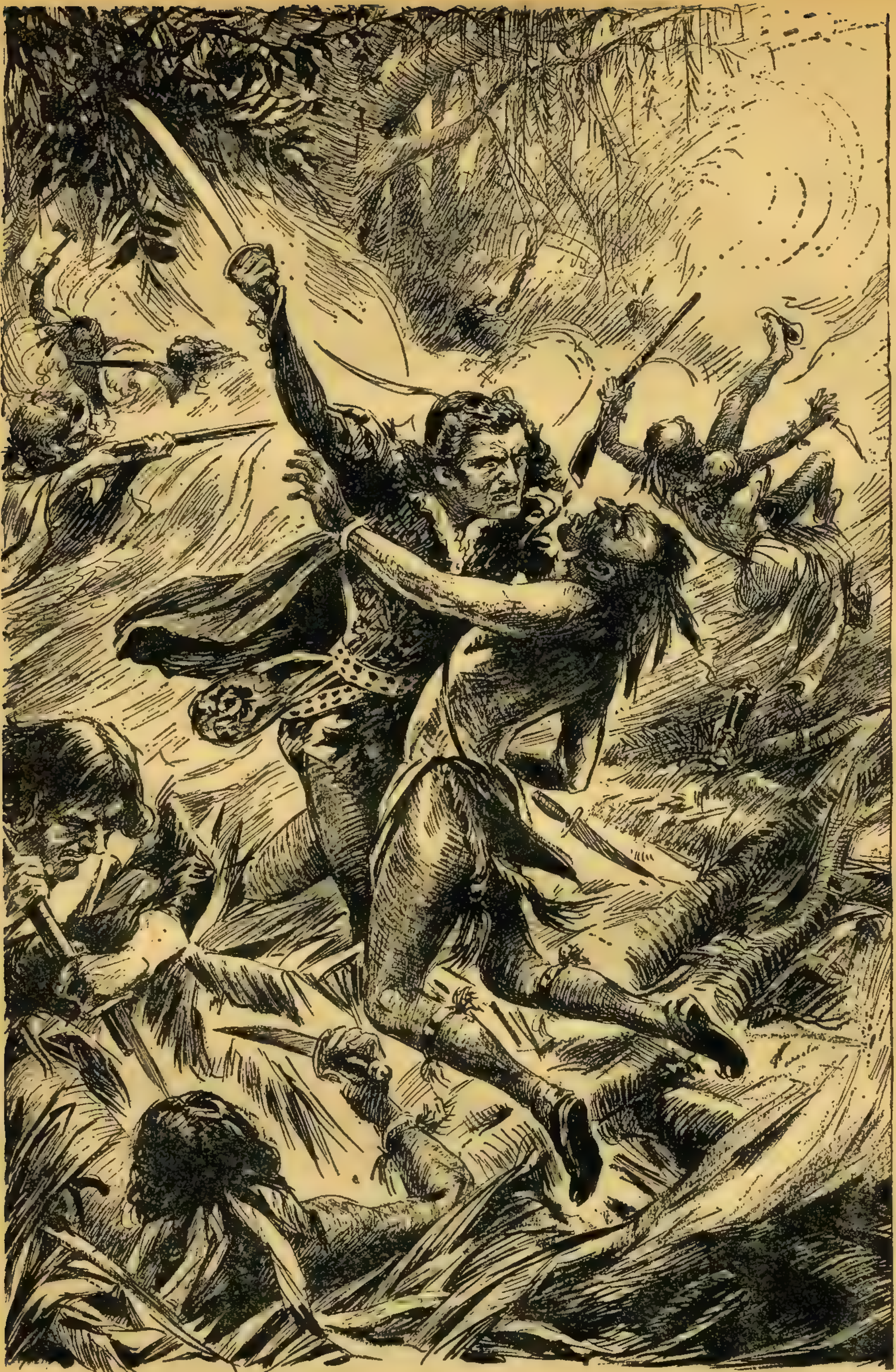
"*Obi, taubada.* I no tell." Then he chuckled. "Like Number One *taubada* I saw Moresby?"

"Like the Number One *taubada* you saw Moresby," Wynter repeated.

He looked around. The American was smiling and, as he smiled, his eyes closed and he fell asleep.

"All right," said Wynter. "Dismiss."

He knew Talibi would treasure his secret even more than the Military Cross he would undoubtedly receive for his bravery.



SOMETHING ROTTEN IN THE FLORIDAS

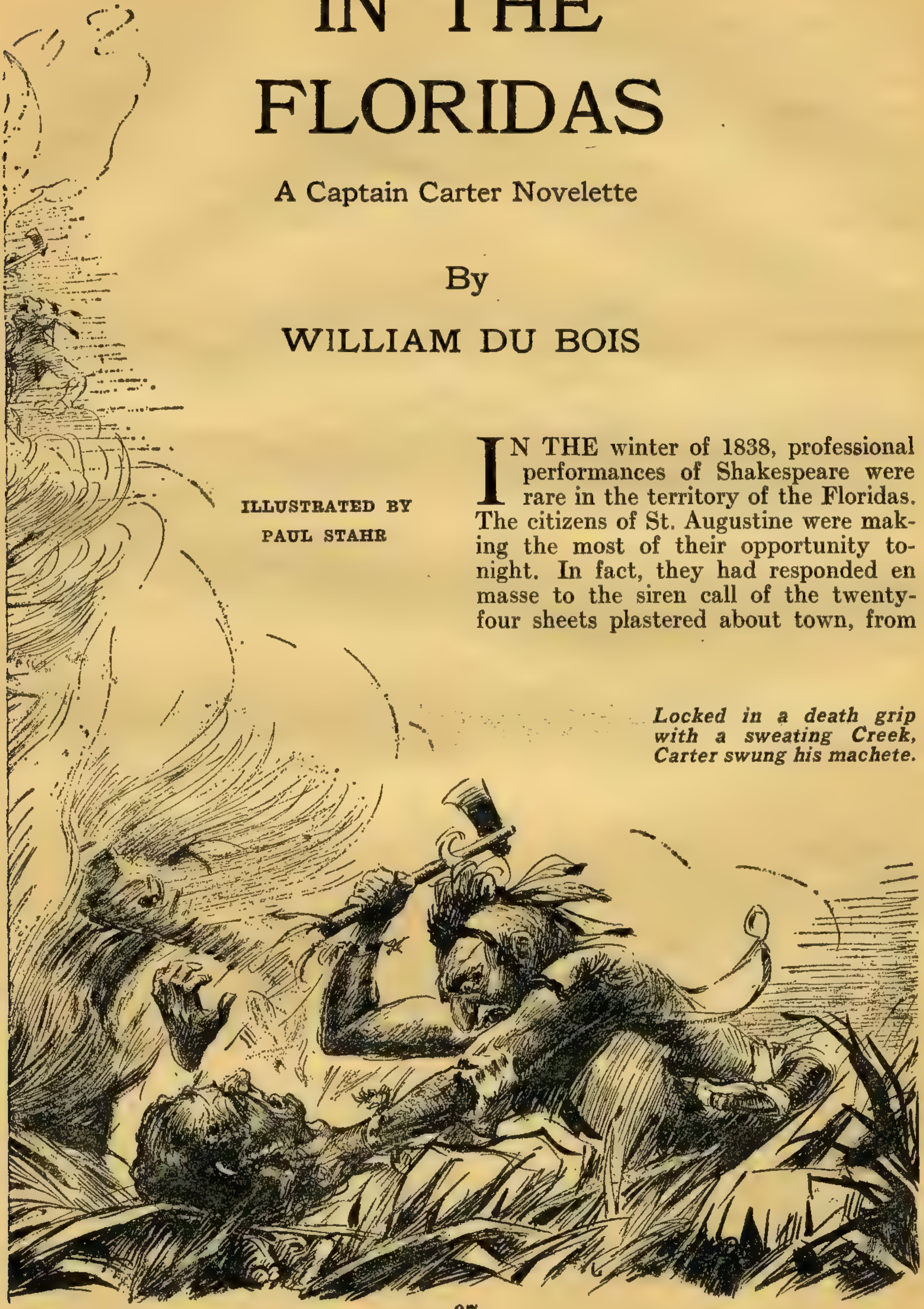
A Captain Carter Novelette

By

WILLIAM DU BOIS

ILLUSTRATED BY
PAUL STAHR

IN THE winter of 1838, professional performances of Shakespeare were rare in the territory of the Floridas. The citizens of St. Augustine were making the most of their opportunity tonight. In fact, they had responded en masse to the siren call of the twenty-four sheets plastered about town, from



Locked in a death grip with a sweating Creek, Carter swung his machete.

the City Gates to the Plaza of the Constitution—

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 30th, at 7 P.M.

MELVILLE KEANE

the world-famous tragedian

ASSISTED BY A STELLAR SUPPORTING TROUPE WILL OFFER, AT THE ARMY BARRACKS,

HAMLET, Prince of Denmark

by William Shakespeare

One Performance only (due to imperative engagements elsewhere)

Come One! - - - Come All!

The theater was the none-too-spacious assembly room in the Army barracks on St. Francis Street; the stage, an impromptu thing of packing boxes and mildewed drapes and candles sputtering in their hurricane lamps. The audience was a strange mixture, even for the times: Yankee parvenus on the same bench with tall militiamen from Georgia, and officers who had seen service against the Sauks in Illinois; American government clerks cheek by jowl with Castilian families whose histories went back to Menendez the conquistador. And yet, from his first entrance, Tragedian Melville Keane had held his audience in the palm of his long, hungry hand.

Keane was lank of limb and noble of brow; his hair swept back across his shoulders like the mane of an untidy lion. His style of acting would be described as scenery-chewing in a more cynical century. Tonight, it had charmed the audience out of workaday dullness and into another world. Attention had not wavered when Keane stalked into the wings after his last soliloquy. The crowd was giving Ophelia the same rapt attention in her mad scene. Ophelia was forty-five, and the unsteady stage creaked beneath her avoirdupois. But she had a wan charm by candlelight. Hearts were melting all over the packed assembly as she pushed back her wild tresses and whispered of rosemary and remembrance. . . .

Brevet Captain John Carter was melting for another reason. The room was oven-close; but regulations forbade any trifling with the dress uniform in the presence of ladies, even though the horse-hair tunic prickled with a special torture of its own.

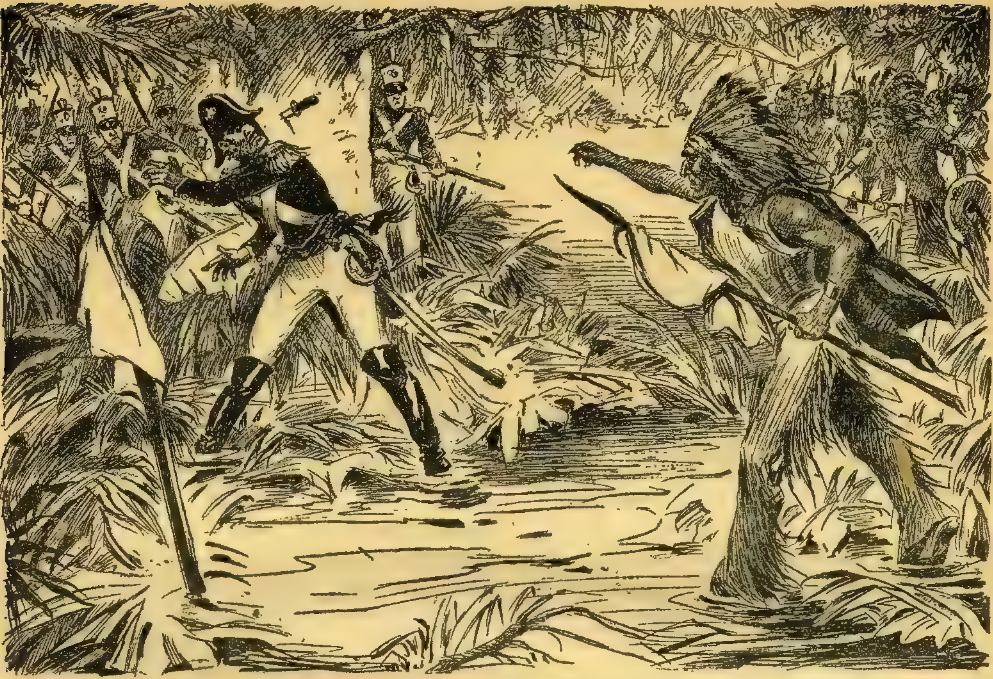
Carter stole a quick look at his general, rapt as a schoolboy two rows ahead. Beside him, Sergeant Grady joined the thunder of applause as Ophelia swept into the wings with one last, despairing cry. Carter loosened the two top buttons of his tunic, and let the steam escape. Wryly he wondered why he was more amused than bored.

He could applaud Melville Keane's troupe with all his heart. Here, on the edge of a sunbitten frontier where an untamed Indian nation still roamed at will, any diversion was welcome. It was not Mr. Keane's fault that Captain Carter had cheered Fanny Kemble in London, between his terms at Oxford. Or applauded Junius Booth from a stall in New York, after he had forsaken a classical tripos for the Army. Perhaps he had immersed himself too completely in this new career. If his own general could forget an unfinished war for an evening, why couldn't he follow suit? Why must the face of the Indian Hospetarkee swim between him and the stage, spoiling even this moment of escape?

Carter forced his atttention back to the stage. The actors were in the graveyard scene now. Laertes was waist-deep in the pit, with Hamlet beside him. The hot young captain suppressed a chuckle as Keane shook off his juvenile's hold, tossed back his mane to the peril of the footlights, and shouted to the ringing rafters—

"I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat
For though I am not splenitive and rash
Yet have I something in me dangerous
Which let thy wiseness fear. Hold off thy
hand!"

"Hold off thy hand!" Odd, how the very words should ring a bell in his mind. . . . The stage faded. Once again, he was standing knee-deep in the muck of the Ocklawaha swamp, a white flag on a standard beside him, Grady and his orderlies in a compact group at his elbow, their arms folded, their carbines muzzle down on their left shoulders. The sunlight had struck a spark on the



To his dying day Carter would remember the whine of the blade as it whistled past.

hammered breastplate that Hospetarkee wore. The Indian had stood in the green shadows, a copper colossus in the gloaming. A white flag had fluttered beside him too, on an up-ended fish-spear.

Hospetarkee had said, "Hold back your hand from our hunting-grounds, Captain Carter. I ask no more than that. Your president has made us that promise before. Will he keep it now?"

"Our treaty says you will hunt south of Fort King, Hospetarkee. You have crossed the line a dozen times. Today you stand on the white man's ground. Tomorrow you may cross the St. John's. Neither our president nor our general in St. Augustine can trust you longer. I have been sent out to capture you—"

"Then why do you come into the swamp with a white flag, Captain?"

"To give you one more chance to respect an agreement you signed of your own free will and go back to the Cypress, where you belong—"

The Indian had raised himself to his full height. To his dying day, Carter would remember the whine the knife made as it whistled past his ear to sink deep in the cypress behind him.

"My father signed the treaty at Payne's Landing, not I," said Hospetarkee. "*There* is the pen I use to sign a white man's treaty."

He had spoken once again, as he faded into the swamp with his escort. A mocking voice, unreal as a ghost's in the gloom, full of the same overtones of terror.

"Take my knife from the tree, Captain. You may need it, when we meet again."

NEXT week, the Seminoles had crossed the river in force to pillage as far north as Tocoi, to stand briefly at the Picoalta Ford for one of those screaming, heat-drugged afternoons of war that ended with a score of dead on either side, a smooth retreat into the swamps of the far bank, a futile pursuit to the fastness of the Ocklawaha. . . . But St. Augustine was filled with frightened farmers again, and for good reason. The Indians had been ghosting across the St. John's for a month now: small war-parties that refused to stand and fight, yet burned barns at will, almost to the city gates. Twice in that month, the Tocoi stage had been overturned on the road. Now the company refused to send out another carry-all to meet the boats, even under Army escort.

Carter turned back to the stage with his scowl intact.

"Dost thou come here to whine?
To outface me with leaping in her grave?
Be buried quick with her, and so will I,
And, if thou prate of mountains, let them throw
Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
Make Ossa like a wart!"

Once more applause rocked the pack-jammed theater. Carter forced himself to join—and turned gratefully back to reality when his orderly's fingers brushed his elbow. Corporal Simpson who had preferred guard-mount to Thespis tonight, was whispering in his ear.

"Bit of trouble, sir. If you'll step outside for a look—"

"Shall I warn the general?"

"Don't think so, sir. It's a fire just off the parade. The old Ximines house. . . . Boys had it pretty well licked when I came off the buckets."

Carter had already touched Grady's arm. The three of them filed out on tiptoe. The audience, waiting breathlessly for the sword-play of the finale, hardly stirred as they passed.

On the stoop of the barracks Carter paused to take a great gulp of the clean night air. He saw at once that the corporal's summons had been only in line of duty. Simpson, and a dozen other drama-haters in the garrison, had done a thorough job of checking the fire at its source. The Ximines house, property of a Greco-Spanish family that had gone back to Cuba with the American annexation, stood alone in its oleander grove. The green leaves of these bunchy, weed-like trees had soaked up most of the sparks. Though the roof of the house was gone and the interior gutted, its coquina walls would stand up for rebuilding tomorrow.

Then he saw that Grady was running across the parade, unlimbering his pistol as he ran. Carter gathered his ceremonial sword under one arm, and rushed after him. Experience had told him that Sergeant Grady never bestirred himself without reason.

"Beg pardon, sir, but they found an Indian in the rubble—"

"A Seminole?"

"Toasted to a turn he was, sir. What's more, they snubbed off another, before he could snake into the Matanzas."

Carter pulled up sharp in the Ximines' front yard. The caved-in embers of the house breathed at him like a dying furnace blast. He stood aside mechanically as the bucket-brigade rushed in for one last toss. Simpson was already at his elbow, respectfully at attention.

"Didn't the actors camp in this house, Grady?"

"They did indeed, sir. Left their traps here, I believe. Everything but their costumes."

Carter turned sharply back toward the barracks, his heel-clicks hard with purpose now. Why had he dreamed so persistently of Hospetarkee during Shakespeare's thundering iambics? He smiled as he heard the final hurricane of applause break on the warm winter's night. Perhaps he had not been wool-gathering, after all.

"I'll talk to our Indian prisoner now, Grady. Not that I expect him to tell me much."

IN two years of catch-as-catch-can war, Captain John Carter and his general had developed a certain grudging fondness for one another. Like most arrangements in a less than perfect world, this liking was founded on mutual respect. The general was down-to-earth as a bear in the spring: the sort of bear who would never endure the torment of dress-parade without inward writhings. Carter was a *beau sabreur* from West Point, who had tempered his classroom wisdom in three hard campaigns and learned that the Articles of War may be excess baggage when one is ferreting Seminoles out of a jungle hammock.

The morning after the performance of *Hamlet*, Carter sat uneasily in the orderly room, watching his superior pace off last night's news. In his undershirt and a pair of faded fatigue pantaloons, the general was anything but military.

But the general did not need shoulder-straps to convey authority. . . . Carter felt that quality, full-force, when the big-shouldered man whirled on him at last, with inspiration blazing in his steel-blue eyes.

"Red meat, roasting on our own parade ground, Jack. It's too damned close—"

"I've told you it wasn't a war party, sir. Just a pair of thieving braves, who dared to swim the Matanzas. Neither of them was armed—"

"They knew better. Prison at Moultrie is better than death by hanging, eh?" The general took a long turn of the room; he sounded oddly contented, after that first outburst. "You're *sure* they were after those actors' costumes?"

"So the survivor said. It was the one fact he admitted freely. That gypsy troupe has given performances at Pensacola and Tampa. The story must have gotten back to the Nation, somehow." Carter smiled wryly. "Of course, it's more than an Indian's love of finery. Someone has told Hospetarkee that Mr. Keane can strike down people with a look, providing he's dressed properly. Naturally, those costumes are worth their weight in egret feathers—if only as medicine against enemies."

The general said, with surprising gentleness, "I figured that out for myself, Jack. Why d'you suppose they thought the costumes were at the Ximines place?"

"They'd heard that the gypsies used many costumes. Naturally, they didn't know that actors work from wardrobe trunks, in the theater itself."

"I wish you wouldn't call them gypsies. To my mind, Mr. Keane is a first-rate artist. I was proud to shake his hand after last night's performance."

It was Carter's turn to be gentle, now. "Sorry I'm not a drama-lover, sir. May I ask why you are dwelling so long on Mr. Keane?"

"Because, like Hamlet, I'm convinced that the play's the thing. In fact, I'm about to enlist your help in a little ruse."

"I was afraid of that," said Carter, with his best boyish grin.

"Mr. Keane has moved his troupe to the Lopez place, just inside the city gates. Within the hour, he plans to ride down the Tocoi road, cross the St. John's, and proceed to Tallahassee."

"But that's impossible—"

"I told him that. But Mr. Keane can be almost as stubborn as you, Jack, when his mind is made up."

Carter exploded to his feet. "He'd be cut to pieces before he reached Ten Mile Hammock. Perhaps I'm the last one who should admit it, sir, but no road west of the St. John's is safe for civilians now. Not until we've found some way to smoke Hospetarkee out for another battle."

"Wake up, Jack," said the general. He poked Carter delightedly with one ramrod-stiff finger. "Why d'you suppose I'm talking around Keane like this?"

"Surely you don't mean to use him for a—a decoy, sir?"

"This Saturday Mr. Keane's troupe is giving an outdoor performance of *As You Like It* on the governor's lawn at Tallahassee. All of them look upon this occasion as a command performance. Being true actors, they are willing to fight their way through Indians to keep their engagement."

"Far be it from me to stop them, sir, but—"

"I'm not asking you to stop them, Jack. I'm ordering you to take Grady and twenty first-class men and act as their escort."

The blue blaze died in the general's eyes. With a satisfied snort, he sat down behind his desk again, to await his favorite trouble-solver's reaction.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I'm afraid I don't quite see—"

"I know you don't, my boy. Wars aren't fought this way at the Point. Up there, your enemy didn't decide on his battle by the shape of the moon. Or roast his enemy's liver over a slow fire to take on his enemy's strength. Or wear the white man's costume to learn his cunning, too. . . . Must I draw up your campaign plan from here on, or will you take over?"

Carter said quietly, "I'll take over now, sir, if I may call in Grady."

The general let out his breath in a full-throated chuckle before he barked a command into the squadroom. Grady ambled in with his old travesty of a salute unburnished by two years of Carter's discipline. . . . *He's talked this over with the old man hours ago,* thought Carter. *When will these two shellbacks realize that I'm old enough to organize my own raids?*

"Take my chair, Grady," said the general. "I'm dropping into the Lopez place for a half-hour. Mr. Keane promised to recite that last soliloquy for me, if I came before noon."

GRADY sat down in the general's chair as though to the manner born, and made a prayer-book of his hands while Captain John Carter stumped the orderly room in an orgy of soft-voiced cursing.

"I should never have let those actors leave the Charleston packet, Grady. I should have sent them north again—"

"If you ask me, sir, the general's plan has merit."

Carter sat down gloomily on a windowsill and stared out at the sweep of the Matanzas. So far, his bad temper was only a shield. He knew in advance that he would agree to Grady's plan. That he would see it through, smoothing its rough edges with technique learned at the Point.

"The general plans to use those actors as a decoy, Grady. D'you think Hospetarkee will come after them—into open country—when he sees us marching as their escort?"

"But he won't know us, sir. You see, we'll be in costume, too." Grady was enjoying himself now. "When the Ximines house burned, those actors lost everything *but* their costumes. They have trunksful of those at the barracks —just as they came ashore from the packet—"

"Are you suggesting that I march into the scrub, disguised as Hamlet?"

"Indeed no, sir. Mr. Keane will wear his Hamlet tights when he rides out today." Grady's lopsided grin was seraphic, now. "The general and I thought you'd look much nicer as Romeo."

He silenced Carter's protest with a soothing hand, as he whisked to the window and whistled down into the courtyard. Corporal Simpson marched into view from the squadroom door, prompt as an ingenue on her first cue. A blond wig with waist-long curls did wonders for the corporal's slightly equine profile. A gold-embroidered dress dropped in voluminous folds to the corporal's oversize boots, sweeping the dust of the courtyard in a dramatic half-circle, before Simpson marched out of sight again, on Grady's signal.

"Be honest, sir. Would *you* know that he wasn't Juliet, if you saw him riding side-saddle on the Tocoi road? 'Course, we were planning to leave the ladies of the troupe behind, on a trip like this. . . . Simpson could carry an extra bandolier under that bustle, and not even Hospetarkee would be the wiser."

He whistled again into the courtyard. Buaro, the company's Negro guide, marched into view as the Moor of Venice, complete to flaring pantaloons and jewel-crusted vest, his gold ear-rings flashing in the sunlight. Not even the Bard of Avon could have dreamed up a handsomer Othello. . . . Carter found himself applauding, somewhat against his will, when Buaro swept the courtyard in a deep bow.

"I see the idea is beginning to shape up in your mind, sir," said Grady. "'Course, we must start today, before those red monkeys get wind of it. . . . If you ask me, we should be getting into our own costumes now. If we hurry, we might get to the city gates in time to hear that soliloquy—"

Carter said crisply, "I've no wish to listen to more of Mr. Keane's rantings. Especially if I'm to be part of his supporting troupe. I suppose you've selected the rest of our company?"

"They're saddled up now, sir, with rations drawn. May I help you into your tights?"

Carter walked thoughtfully to the general's armoire and stared for a long moment at the image in the cheval-glass. Forgotten memories of university dramatics had crept into his mind, unbidden. He found himself striking an attitude and whirled away from the mirror to stare down Grady's chuckle.

"Romeo, eh? And whom are *you* impersonating?" he demanded of Grady.

"Ophelia, sir," said the sergeant. "I hope you don't mind."

CHAPTER II

THE PLAY'S THE THING

THE troop rode out of barracks to an obligato of cheers—a bizarre outfit, their side-arms masked in moth-eaten Shakespearean robes. Iago riding knee-to-knee with Desdemona and Florizel; Marc Antony whistling a highly unprintable ballad as he coquetted with a burly Rosalind. . . . Carter, magnificent in the crimson doublet of Romeo, barked an order. The troop saluted the colors as they wheeled through the parade-ground arch and cantered down the cobbles of St. George Street where it swung north toward the city gates.

The Lopez house stood on the edge of the little square, beside the sentry-boxes and the crumbling moat that Spain had built a century ago to repel the threat of Oglethorpe. Carter could hear the boom of Melville Keane's voice before he leaned to strike the knocker-plate of the patio. The actor entered St. George Street as though it were another stage—already astride a white nag that somehow suggested a charger as Keane sawed its head around to salute his escort. The black tights of the Prince of Denmark suited the moment perfectly—suggesting tragedy and drama in one breath-taking silhouette. Carter found himself shaking hands, quite as though he had squired Melville Keane from his début.

"Be honest, Captain," said Keane. "Have you ever seen Hamlet on horseback before?"

He had already signaled to his supporting cast, who now rode out of the patio in his wake—a dozen tatterdemalions clad in the left-overs from the costume trunks, a scattering of clowns and monsters from *Midsummer Night,* and one authentic Caesar whom Carter recognized as last night's juvenile. The street was alive with their voices now, as they fraternized with the troopers—cockney and lisping French, and the nasals of New York's Bowery. . . . From a low balcony above them, the haggard Ophelia leaned down to blow them a kiss. Keane rose in his stirrups like a good-natured king, to give back the compliment with interest.

"Miss Lambert is an exceptional woman, Captain. Believe me, it took persuasion to keep her out of this fight."

Carter nodded curtly, and led the way through the city gates at a gallop, ignoring the salute of the provost guard. Buaro and Grady had already whipped into place behind him, their eyes darting into the scrub from long habit—the dense tangle of palmetto and wild grape that rose like a yellow wall beyond the moat.

A half-mile beyond the town, he gentled his mount into a jog-trot again, and swung the column's nose to the west, to take the corduroy road that led to Tocoi and the Picoalta ford on the St. John's.

Now was the time to rein in and count heads. Carter pulled off the road a bit, and let the column canter past. Grady had done a good job with the costumes; not even his practiced eye could pick out actor from regular in that swirl of dust and pounding hooves. He turned sharply on his saddle as Keane laughed—a full-bodied laugh, pitched to carry to the topmost gallery in any opera house. It was a bit of a shock to realize that the tragedian had kept pace with him so far.

"Don't look so startled, Captain. I learned my horsemanship in London, before I answered the call of Thespis. I might add that I am also accomplished with saber and pistol. I've fought duels in five languages, and lost only one of them. D'you think we'll be attacked today? Or will they wait till we've crossed the river?"

He had spoken so quietly that Carter found himself answering in the same vein—without pausing to remind himself that the man was probably giving his best performance.

"I'm glad the general gave you a true picture of our purpose, sir."

"To be frank, Captain, he refused me an escort on any other terms. Believe me, I was willing to ride out alone. So was my company. . . . We will not disappoint our public in Tallahassee. Even if we must give a rep show, with the ladies absent."

But Carter had recovered his poise by now, as he swung into the rear of the cantering column. "Tell me this, Mr. Keane. Have you ever fought Indians, except in melodramas?"

"Never, sir. But I've fought Arabs in Morocco, and fuzzy-headed cannibals in Java. Yes, and slept with Malay pirates aboard a *prahu* at Zanzibar. I am a citizen of the world, Captain. My art is my passport, even on this wild frontier. It has already won me your general's favor. I trust it will win yours, before we reach your territorial capital."

"Frankly, Mr. Keane, I expect to be dug in behind palmetto logs before then, fighting for my life." Carter permitted himself the luxury of a rare smile. "It's good to know that my decoy will also be my—ally."

THE spurred his horse to the head of the column again, barked an order to Grady, and remembered, just in time, to ease to a jog-trot to merge with the other riders. . . . He was posing as an actor now, not as a soldier. At least, until they reached Ten Mile Hammock. Even as Romeo, he was a member of Melville Keane's supporting cast.

Keane had stayed beside him in these changes of pace, with all the ease of a circus rider. "Must you turn this pleasant ride into a maneuver so soon, Captain?"

"On the contrary. I'm trying to make this maneuver look as unsoldierly as possible. Especially to a suspicious Seminole—if one is watching us from that clump of cabbage-palms to the west. Believe me, that's much more difficult."

"Surely you've done all you can for the present. Can't we enjoy each other's company for a while? Perhaps my life story would interest you. My memoirs fill nine volumes of notes now. . . . Or if you prefer, tell me yours."

The man's gaiety was infectious. Once again, Carter found himself replying in kind.

"Don't tell me your enjoying this ride?"

"And why not? How often can a poor troubadour like myself ride out into a sunny winter morning, with his appetite satisfied, his soul at peace, and a young man of parts for his companion? What more can a student of humanity ask?"

"You flatter me, sir. I'm a soldier who has always been too busy for manners."

"Your general tells a different story, Captain. I know that you were educated abroad. You gave up a brilliant future as a lawyer to take part in these Indian wars. You are destined for great things in your young army, if you can add Hospetarkee's feather to your cap. . . . But of course you aren't thinking in terms of destiny. Were I your age, I suppose that I, too, would expect wars like these to go on forever."

Carter kept his voice steady as he fought down a smile. "Don't tell me you've fought in wars, too?"

"Besides the Arabs and the cannibals I mentioned," said Keane, with perfect aplomb, "I fought the French at Waterloo. I fought for Louis Phillipe, the citizen-king, in the revolution of '30. Of course, I was younger then; every battle seemed holy with meaning. Most of us outgrow that illusion, if we live long enough—"

"Your pardon, Mr. Keane, but what bearing does your career have on Hospetarkee?"

"We have seen the world from different angles, Captain. From both sides of the medal, as it were. Perhaps the low tricks of my trade will serve you after all. . . . Just how did you propose to capture this Hospetarkee?"

Carter said carefully, "It's impossible to make plans where Indians are concerned. The more you know about them, the less you'll ever really know. This war has dragged on for nearly three years now, and we've yet to corner them for a forced battle. The best we can do is hunt them—precisely as you'd hunt orang-outangs in Java."

He fixed Keane with a level look, but the tragedian took the reference in his stride. "I have had experience in that field too. Five months in the hill country above Batavia, with a scientific group from The Hague. We worked for the most part in jungles that were dripping pestilence when Eve was a wishbone.

Believe me, you haven't lived until you've wakened at midnight with a king cobra coiled on your chest."

"Pardon me again, Mr. Keane, but do you ever stop acting?"

"I've asked myself that question often, Captain. Perhaps I don't. I cannot reproach myself. As Plato said, most illusions are more precious than reality . . . For example, the illusion that you have joined my group of players, bound for a command performance in Tallahassee. Shouldn't we talk and act like players — with a little exaggeration thrown in? Surely we will never deceive the Indians unless we live our roles."

"For three years now," said Carter, "I've crisscrossed these pine barrens with suicide troops—showing myself on the edge of the hammocks, daring them to come out and fight. This time, I've every hope that Hospetarkee will take the dare—"

"Just who is this red superman?"

"A renegade chief who refused to honor the treaties his father signed for the tribe. He's holed in at Ten Mile Hammock from the beginning, and dared us to drive him out. Tonight, we're taking that dare and camping on the edge of that swamp. If he is taken in by the costumes, as the general hopes—if he thinks we're a group of traveling gypsies—he'll probably storm our camp at sunup."

"How strong will he be?"

"We have no way of knowing. The last time we sent Buaro to scout his outposts, he reported a force of just under eighty. Of course, he gets reenforcements from time to time. Gun-runners, or young braves like himself who won't consent to removal."

Keane said, with complete calm, "I should like to meet him face to face, in the heart of that swamp. Perhaps I could frighten him into surrender."

"Might I ask how?"

"An actor can play many parts, Captain. Perhaps, if I appeared to Hospetarkee as his tribal God—"

"Or as Hamlet's ghost, perhaps?"

"Do you doubt that these Seminoles can be conquered by other means than bullets?"

Carter slapped his horse into a gallop—and slackened the reins when he remembered that this must appear as an undisciplined—and slightly aimless—journey toward the St. John's.

THEY had passed the first posting-stable long ago. The road skirted a dry savannah now, to sweep west through the pine barrens. A neat corduroy road for this wilderness, though the grass was beginning to wipe out the wheel-marks of the last stage.

Keane, still at his elbow, spoke against the counterpoint of drumming horses' hooves. "This country is ceasing to be a frontier even now. No territory that supports a stage-coach road, however rough, can call itself uncivilized."

"Thanks to Hospetarkee, the stages ceased to run a month ago." Carter pointed to a blackened ruin at the roadside. "That's where the company found the last of them, on Christmas Day. Filled to the guards with women, come down by river boat from Jacksonville to visit their husbands in garrison. The Seminoles touched nothing but their trinkets—and their scalps. *Their* wives wanted those."

He waited hopefully for the reaction, but none came. "I am beginning to hate Hospetarkee, Captain. Thanks to him, my death scene was all but ruined at the assembly last evening. Thanks to him, your general has conceived this preposterous scheme, for which you dislike me thoroughly."

"Believe me, sir, I consider this another job—to be finished without questions."

"Does it trouble you a little, when you remember that your real job is to make this country safe for such as I—forever?"

Carter permitted himself another smile. "You were right the first time, Mr. Keane. I did ride out the city gates this morning prepared to dislike you. So far, you've made that rather difficult."

"You see, I have my uses after all. You think me a fearful liar, and what of it? Aren't my lies harmless? Remember I'm only a poor gypsy, with a guitar and a bag of tricks. Most of them are shopworn enough, God knows. Still, I can make them seem new to my audience. That's my real excuse for living, Captain. To help others to forget how dull most everyday jobs can be. Including soldiering."

Melville Keane rose in his stirrups—a magnificent silhouette against the blue blaze of morning. With one arm extended, he blessed the wild tangle of scrub and jungle that masked the road to the west. Carter remembered the mural in the *alcalde's* house on the Plaza, which showed the landing of de Leon two centuries ago—the heraldic group of priests, the flaming banners, the aged *marques* claiming the Floridas in the name of his king. Melville Keane had brought that mural up to date, in one bit of pantomime. With his gesture, he had made the Floridas part of America, forever. . . . And, for no reason he could name, Carter thought, *Perhaps this fellow is a man, as well as an actor.*

CHAPTER III

ALAS, POOR YORICK!

EIGHTEEN hours later, deep in sleep in their bivouac on the St. John's, Carter struggled with that same problem. Was Keane human, after all—or did the skin-tight hose and frayed doublet house an attitude, and nothing more? Did the costume collapse like a tired balloon when there was no audience to listen to its wheezing? Questions like these are seldom solved in a drugged stupor—especially if they are obscured by nightmare.

Carter's dream was in full swing now. Melville Keane managed to fill most of it, which is a way that incubi have in nightmares. One moment, he was smiling out of a barbaric frame of egret feathers, while he spouted a soliloquy from *Hamlet*—with all the words in Seminole. The next, he was riding thunder-heads on a black Pegasus with shark-fins for wings. Or looming against a flaming horizon, his face a celestial mask—until it changed, in a twinkling, to the face of Hospetarkee. . . .

Carter sat up and groped for his pistol lanyard—only to snarl his fingers in the jeweled cloak of Romeo. A splinter of sunlight tortured his eyeballs. Then it vanished behind a head fringed with yellow curls—Ophelia's wig in the mad scene. Carter swam back to wakefulness as he recognized Sergeant Grady's whiskered profile in the heart of the blond picture-frame. He recalled vaguely that Grady had spelled him on watch at midnight. He even remembered how he had folded himself in Romeo's cloak to snatch forty winks against a pine-tree bole.

The camp had been pitched on a neck of high ground between two sloughs, where Ten Mile Hammock spilled its chocolate heart into the reach of the St. John's. It was a deliberately amateurish camp, a scattering of men hunched in blankets, each to his own palmetto bush. When a soldier lies down at night expecting an Indian assault at daybreak, he does not advertise his presence in civilian company. Instead, he sends his scouts into the scrub to cut the underbrush away, so that his rifle-fire will be more accurate. If he is very adept, he will chop half-through the spongy boles of a half-dozen cabbage palms, to make sure that the building of a breastworks will be a matter of seconds, not minutes.

None of these careful precautions was apparent to the casual eye. Only Carter noted the sentries watching the swamp on either side—nervously alert men, under their feigned slumber. Only the actors' snores were real now—a fearful threnody, dominated by Keane's bull-frog basso. Carter stared at the tragedian for a few muddled seconds in the dawn light. He looked real enough, now that he was covered to the eyes by a poncho. . . . Carter remembered how nonchalantly the actor had rolled into that blanket last night. If Napoleon could sleep before a battle, so could he.

Grady shocked him wide awake with his first whispered words.

"Beg pardon, sir, but I've just counted noses. We've lost our Caesar."

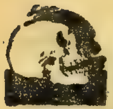
"Say that again?"

"The young actor in the toga, sir. Don't ask me his name. Twenty minutes ago, Simpson let him go down to the water's edge to wash. He hasn't come back. . . . What's more, I can't risk a man to look for him. Right now, I need every eye on those two sloughs. If they jump us at all, they'll come before the day really breaks."

Carter was already on hands and knees —wide-awake in a flash, and vital with purpose.

"Sounds like a job for you and me, Grady."

"I was hoping you'd say that, sir."



IT WAS good to snake down to the water's edge with his sergeant, good to know that years of practice could make him quiet as a water moccasin on the margin of the St. John's. The mile-wide reach of the river was still muffled in mist; long fingers of vapor played a ghostly arabesque among the cypress at the water's edge. But there was enough light to follow Caesar's footsteps. To note that they stepped off into the brackish water without a trace.

"Don't tell me an actor would go *swimming* in that 'gator water, Grady."

"If you ask me, sir, he never touched the water. He was snatched too fast." The sergeant's voice was the hoarsest of whispers. Somehow, it seemed quite natural that he should inch forward in the dog-fennel with his wig askew, like a caricature of Molly Pitcher. Nor did Carter turn a hair when Grady leveled a bony forefinger at a mudbank perhaps a hundred feet offshore. Carter had seen his sergeant turn into a pointer dog before.

"How's your eyesight, sir? Would you recognize a naked actor if you spotted him in that tuft of sawgrass, dead as a herring?"

Carter stared for a long moment across the lightening water, then nodded solemnly. "They didn't waste much time, did they?"

"They never do, when they make up their minds they want something. Now if you'll just look to the right—another hundred yards offshore, where the mist is rolling back."

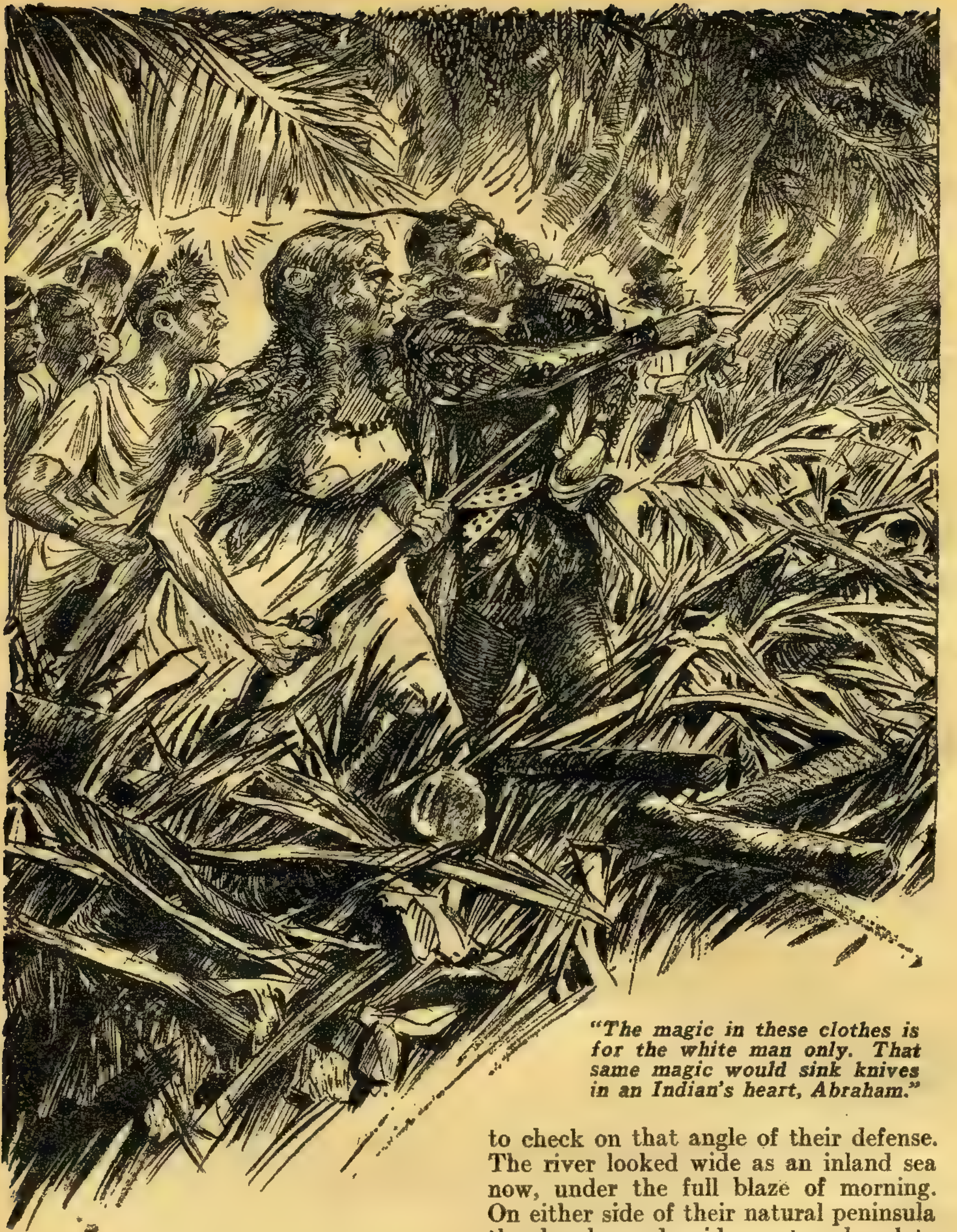
But Carter had already choked the gasp in his throat, as the prow of the war-canoe swam out of the mist—a monstrous dugout with a crown of feathers on its carved prow. A canoe out of a nightmare. . . . Julius Caesar was the crowning touch as he stood insolently erect at the forward thwart—a red ramrod in the toga of a Roman gentleman, the folds of the garment still stained with actor's blood.

Carter did not stir as Grady's rifle cracked beside him. Red Caesar collapsed between the thwarts like a doll. A great shout went up from the canoe—a long wailing war-cry that poured a chill like spring-water down Carter's spine. As though in answer, a heavy volley raked across their high ground, from the mist-muffled bank of either slough. Carter's heart gave a great, exultant bound as his twenty regulars answered the challenge, with withering interest. Then, with Grady at his side, he was running back to camp again—careless of concealment now, and ignoring the fact that Sergeant Grady, in a bramble-touseled wig and billowing skirts, was a sight to give even Hospetarkee pause.

SIMPSON had done a first-rate job in their absence. A half-dozen yanks at their lashed tops, a few lusty axstrokes, and the caggage palms had tumbled earth-ward, to form a ready-made breastworks across the neck of high ground, where the two sloughs ended. Buaro and his squad had already brought in brush to supplement this impromptu obstacle—green wood that would resist fire-tipped arrows, if the hostiles should choose that means to break through.

There had been no more shots after that first volley. Save for the scream of a wounded horse, the camp seemed tranquil enough. And then, Carter saw that most of the actors had burrowed ostrich-like among the scrub in this natural enclosure. All but King Lear and Shylock, who would never act again.

Incredibly enough, there was no sign of Melville Keane. Only the tumbled poncho under a palmetto, mute evidence that the tragedian had bolted for some hole while bolting was practical. Carter shrugged the thought away, and ran crab-wise to the breastworks to bark an

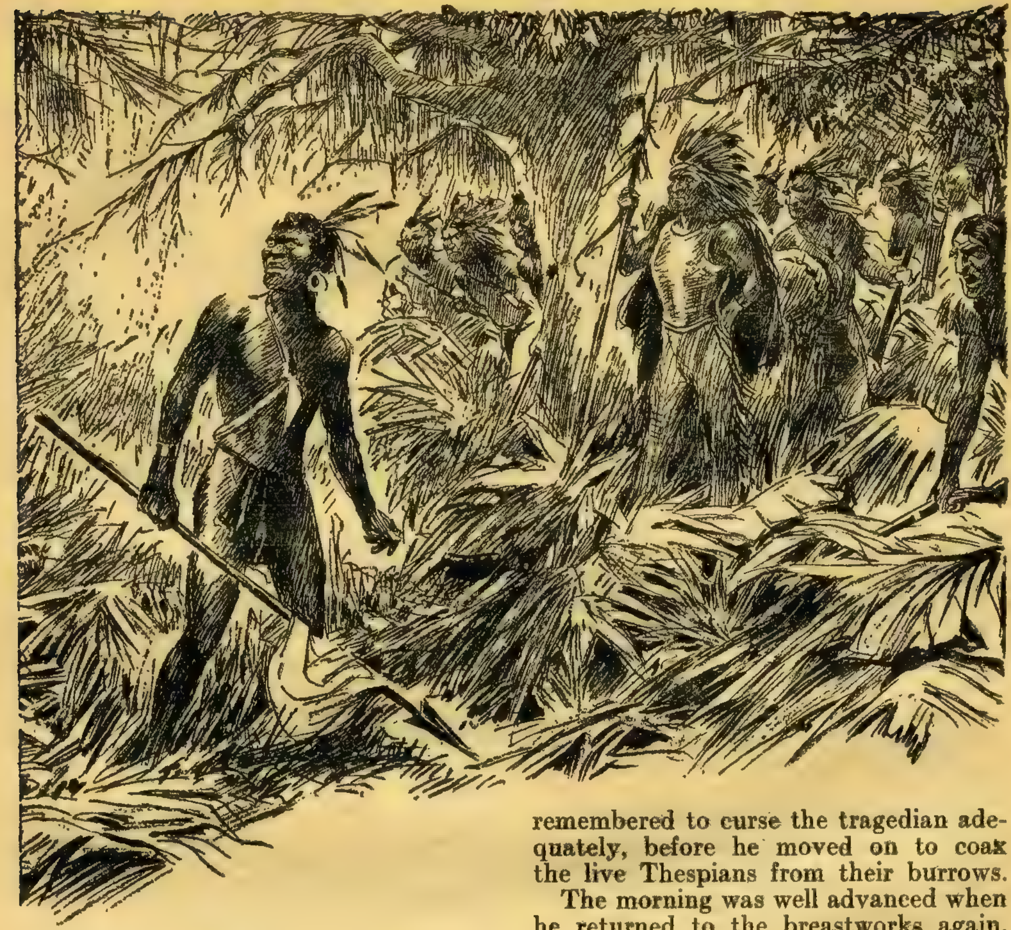


"The magic in these clothes is for the white man only. That same magic would sink knives in an Indian's heart, Abraham."

order or two. Not that orders were needed now, in this band of hard-bitten brothers.

There was no sign of life from the waterside. The war canoe had swerved after the blaze of gunfire, and vanished among the cypress like a homing 'gator. Carter came back from the breastworks to check on that angle of their defense. The river looked wide as an inland sea now, under the full blaze of morning. On either side of their natural peninsula the sloughs made wide moats—chocolate barriers that pushed the tangle of jungle hammock out of rifle shot.

Obviously, the Seminoles had planned to storm the sleeping camp at dawn—and had reeled back from the unexpected volley to make their plans again. Just as obviously, they would now have to wait for darkness to descend before risk-



ing a frontal assault on the breastworks.

Carter spoke crisply to his corporal. "See to that horse, Simpson, and detail men to keep the rest under cover. I'll send you the actors later." He moved on with Grady to check on the dead.

None of his regulars had been scratched—they were too Indian-wise for that. But King Lear lay with his sightless eyes rolled skyward, a withered sexagenarian, whose own frosty poll matched the false whiskers at his chin. Carter wondered if the actor's spirit were looking down from some celestial theater now, commending his own death scene.

The dead Shylock was younger, but no less careworn. Yet a bullet had surprised him in the midst of a pleasant dream, for he was smiling at a secret all his own. Perhaps he had been planning some trick to steal the next performance from Keane himself. . . . Carter remembered to curse the tragedian adequately, before he moved on to coax the live Thespians from their burrows.

The morning was well advanced when he returned to the breastworks again, but it was time well spent. The sternest West Point martinet could not have criticized Captain Carter's preparations for a siege. Each point of the compass on the land side was covered by a carbine; each marksman rested easily behind a loop-holed barricade of his own. The men off watch, cooling their shanks in the St. John's, were sinking sharpened cypress palings, in case a canoe should ghost up after dark. Even the actors were busy over cooking fires.

Grady and Simpson made room at the main defensive line as Carter lifted his glass to sweep the tangle of scrub to the east. A mocking-bird shrilled in the drowsy, sun-steeped hush; far off in the blue, a few prophetic buzzards circled lazily. The pine barrens themselves, baking in the morning, were as empty of life as a lunar plain. It seemed incredible that death was waiting among those dusty palmetto fans—ready to twang a bowstring at the first unwary head.

Grady said easily, "They showed a white flag just now, sir. Think it's worth while to hold a parley?"

"Why not?"

Simpson whipped a guidon over the breastworks on a bamboo stick. For an instant, a square of buckskin gleamed in answer among the palmettoes. The two old-timers watched their captain without comment. Carter's face was still a tranquil blank, concentrated on the detail at hand. He said only, "What's the last word on Keane?"

"Only that he cut for the wagon-road, sir, as fast as horseflesh could travel." Grady hesitated on the next bit of news. "Seems he tethered that white nag of his between those two big water oaks, where the road begins. Seems he'd tricked himself out under that poncho so he'd look like an Indian in bad light."

"Are you telling me he's gone over to them?"

"Reckon that's for you to decide, sir, when you report to the general."

Carter pointed through a chink in the breastworks. *"If,* Grady—not *when."*

EVEN the sergeant let out his breath in a heart-broken sigh. The scrub was alive with feathered headdresses now. Whole tiers of red bodies gleamed in the sun like polished bronze. . . . Spread in a great fan-shaped arc before the breastwork, they had come to a silent life of their own. There was Hospetarkee himself in the center, still a bit larger than life in the full glare of day. There was Abraham, his Negro slave and spokesman, advancing to the breastworks with the white buckskin spread like a pennant on a pole.

Carter rose up to match the Negro's gesture of truce. He had bargained before with Abraham, and knew that the Negro was an honest translator of his master's will.

Abraham drove the pole lightly into the spongy earth, and held up both *café au lait* palms, to show he was unarmed.

"Will the captain bargain?"

"With Hospetarkee? I thought we'd made our last truce."

"My master desires the captain to know that he admires this ruse. So much that he is willing to retire to the hammock again, if the captain will give him what he wants." The Negro hesitated, then went on, with perfect politeness. "As the captain sees we are five to his one."

"We are better shots, Abraham, and we are safe behind palmetto logs. The battle will be equal."

"Only while the light lasts, Captain. You know you will all be dead by morning, if you try to stand here. Surely it is better to use our lead in hunting."

"I am pleased to know the great Hospetarkee fears us. Perhaps you should tell him that we are three to his five," Carter replied.

Abraham said, with aplomb, "You have less than fifty men behind that breastworks, Captain. Less than half of them can handle rifles. Remember, we counted heads when you rode to the river. Are you still deaf to honorable terms?"

"Speak a moment more, Abraham. I will listen, for old times' sake."

"Listen for your own life's sake, Captain. Hospetarkee asks only that you surrender your mounts and the magic clothes you wear. You may keep your food and your side-arms." Abraham's smile was dazzling. "You may even keep your boots, and your cotton drawers. We would not have you marching back naked to St. Augustine."

Carter kept his own poker-face. "How could I meet such terms and keep my honor?"

"That, too, is a white man's problem," said Abraham. He glanced back to the red lines, and his voice grew knife-thin. "They want their answer now."

Carter flicked his jeweled doublet lightly. "The magic in these clothes is for the white man only. On an Indian's back, that same magic would sink knives in his heart. How long did your brave live to wear the white nightgown he stole this morning?"

"Hospetarkee believes that he can tame the magic," said Abraham. "Will the captain surrender his horse and his clothes—and keep his hair?"

Carter said levelly, "You have five

minutes to get out of gunshot, Abraham.”

The Negro’s face remained impassive—a dark papyrus where the sorrows of time had written themselves out long ago. “So be it, Captain. We have parleyed before—and lived to shake hands when treaty-making was over. It grieves me to say good-bye to you for the last time.”

He picked up his staff on that, and walked away into the scrub again. Not a leaf had stirred in the brazen hush of noon; but, in that twinkling, the hundred-odd copper bodies had melted into the green, as mysteriously as they had appeared. Only the great dark birds continued to wheel above. There were more now—a dozen in all. *Perhaps the Indians are right about them,* thought Carter. *Perhaps they can really smell out death, a mile away.*

CHAPTER IV

LAY ON, MACDUFF!

THE hands of his watch showed five o’clock. Five hours since the parley—and already, it was so dark that Carter needed a precious lucifer to verify the time. Sunset would fall any moment now, in these latitudes. The edge of the wilderness had begun to pale with night’s promise—the sort of evil gloaming that could conjure up ghouls of its own among the cypress. Five hours at the barricade, watching the darkening jungle with eyes that did not dare to waver. It was good to know that the long strain was over. The first throb of the medicine-drum, deep in the hammock’s heart, was more a deliverance than a threat.

Buaro, the hulking Negro scout, whispered in Spanish.

“En seguida,” said Carter. He did not even hear the Negro vault the barricade. The black skin was one, now, with the encroaching night. He knew only that Buaro was spread-eagled in the scrub fifty feet to the left, ready to touch a lucifer to the dry brush they had tossed into the palmettoes. *Signal Number One,* he thought, in a wild surge of hope. *A matter of minutes now. From then on, our planning depends on our timing. If Signal Number Two is late—*

He did not finish the thought, as palmetto fans began to whisper under the pressure of creeping bodies. The Seminoles could afford to be careless as they converged upon the breastworks. Hospetarkee knew that Carter was too good a soldier to waste his powder on shadows. True to his word, he would storm the camp with a strong force, the moment the light failed in earnest. Assault from the water side could come later. Carter had fought Indians waist-deep in gumbo before. He could picture them swarming across those sloughs, with hatchets in their teeth. If the first wave failed, the war canoes would be ready with more.

A faint bird-call sounded from the dark, to be answered by another. Carter shouted again in Spanish, but Buaro had not waited for orders. Live flame ran down the brush as the Indians charged, a blaze that changed the amorphous terror of the attack into fifty dancing silhouettes. The carbines cracked in unison; the advancing line staggered drunkenly when more than half the bullets chunked home. And then the flame-lit scrub was empty again as the Indians sought cover—all but one wounded brave, who squirmed to within a yard of the breastworks, a snake with a broken back. Carter rose deliberately, to send a derringer bullet through the Indian’s brain. The brush-fire had already hissed out against the green palmettoes. Darkness was absolute, as he crouched beside Grady again. He could not even see the sergeant’s face, though his handclasp was real enough.

“Shouldn’t be too human at a time like this, sir,” said Grady. “At that, I think the first round’s ours.”

“Only if they stop and think it over—”

A CHEER ran down the line when the first torch sprang to life, far out on the pine barren—to be followed by a second, and a third, until the watchers at the barricade would have sworn that a whole regiment was sweeping in to force the Indians’ position from the east. *So*

Signal Two was right on time, thought Carter. *Will Hospetarkee know that a dozen scared militia-men are running those torches through the scrub, with nothing behind them? That the general's relieving force is packed solid on their left, ready to enfilade them if they attack? Or will he jump to his canoes, and run for cover, as he's done before?*

He had prepared himself for these alternates long ago; in fact, he was ready for anything, except the hurricane attack that now converged on the breastworks. The Indians were entering no traps tonight. Evidently they hoped to sweep Carter's camp from end to end, before the reenforcement could grope its way to battle in the dark.

This time they hurled torches of their own—slivers of fat yellow-pine, that whizzed into the enclosure with a feathered arrow behind them, to lose themselves for a moment in the bushy heart of a tree; to burst into evil life again, as the resinous tree itself took fire like a candle in Brobdignag. Of course, the ruse backfired. Some of the trees outside the enclosure caught fire too: before the hand-to-hand fighting could start in earnest, the Seminoles were bathed in the same red glare. But the struggle had gone beyond concealment now.

Carter himself hacked down the first Indian to straddle the breastworks, and pistoled the second at arm's length. After that, they came too fast to count. Each man was on his own now, fighting his own personal Iliad. . . . Locked in a death-grip with a sweating Creek, Carter kicked himself free and swung his machete again with good effect. As he caught breath, he saw Grady go down under a nightmare of copper limbs, watched the sergeant send his man crashing in a flying tackle and finish the job with a lethal gun-butt before the Seminole could rise again. Simpson was down too, with a tomahawk at his throat, before Carter's second derringer-barrel stopped that.

The first wave had spent itself now. No time to count heads, as they staggered back to their ruined breastworks to repel new boarders. No time to turn and run, as the firelit scrub seemed to sprout a naked brave in every bush.

"Spare carbines!" roared Carter. "Fire at will!"

This time, the volley did not even slow the advance. Carter saw Hospetarkee rise up in his guerrillas' midst to whoop his final order. He raised his empty derringer and cursed the blood streaming across his eyes as he fumbled with a reload. Something had checked the red tide when he looked up again. Something formless as Portent, and ten times as massive: a mad horseman who carried a torch into the Seminoles' midst—and a crusader's sword, pointed straight for Hospetarkee's heart. In that same moment, Carter saw that the horseman wore clanking armor and a winged casque from which his long locks flew wild, like a Viking's gone berserk. And as the Indians fell back before this offer of battle, Carter heard a familiar voice booming—

"Turn, hell-hound, turn! Lay on, Macduff!
And damn'd be he who first cries, "Hold,
enough!"

"Look, Grady! It's our actor!"

But Grady had other business afoot. Carter held his breath as he watched his sergeant sight down the rifle barrel. The report was drowned in the babble of savage voices, screaming fears older than time. The Seminoles would never know that it was a bullet that had pierced Hospetarkee's brain. From the Seminoles' angle, death had sprung by magic from Macbeth's own sword— when Melville Keane, riding hell-for-leather, was still a hundred feet distant from their chief.

Carter did not even wait for the howling rout that followed. As he went over the breastworks with his regulars at his heels, he had a brief glimpse of Keane, still high on his white nag's neck, slapping out on all sides at retreating red backs with the broadside of a property sword.

Already, the enfilading fire had begun from the high ground to his left; already, he could see the triumphant advance of the general's picked marksmen, scurrying figures against a flaming backdrop, kneeling only to load and fire. And then the exultant tide of war lifted him with the others, and swept him on, into a finale that even Shakespeare might have envied.

THE general cooled his feet in the St. John's, and champed on a sausage roll. Seated on a stump nearby, Brevet Captain John Carter submitted to Grady's ministrations, as the sergeant repaired the nick above his temple. Behind them, a bivouac fire blazed high, to light the regulars in their grisly task of policing a recent battle ground.

"Keane must have come down the corduroy to warn us," said the general. "*Ventre-à-terre,* as it were. . . . That white plug he was riding was in a lather when we met him, just beyond the first stage. He'll never know how narrowly he escaped a bullet in that Seminole make-up. It fooled even me, at three hundred yards."

"I should have told him all our plans," said Carter. "Of course, he never knew that I meant to dig in here deliberately, until you relieved me."

"He said he put on the Indian make-up to be sure of clearing the attack when it came. As you saw just now, he had one more costume in his saddle-bag. One more trick to turn the business in our favor."

The general chuckled as he ate his supper and wriggled his toes contentedly in the Florida mud. He added, "I must say that things might have gone badly for you, if he hadn't ridden into their midst in that crazy armor. Hospetarkee knew he was cornered; but he meant to wipe you out before I pinned him on the riverbank."

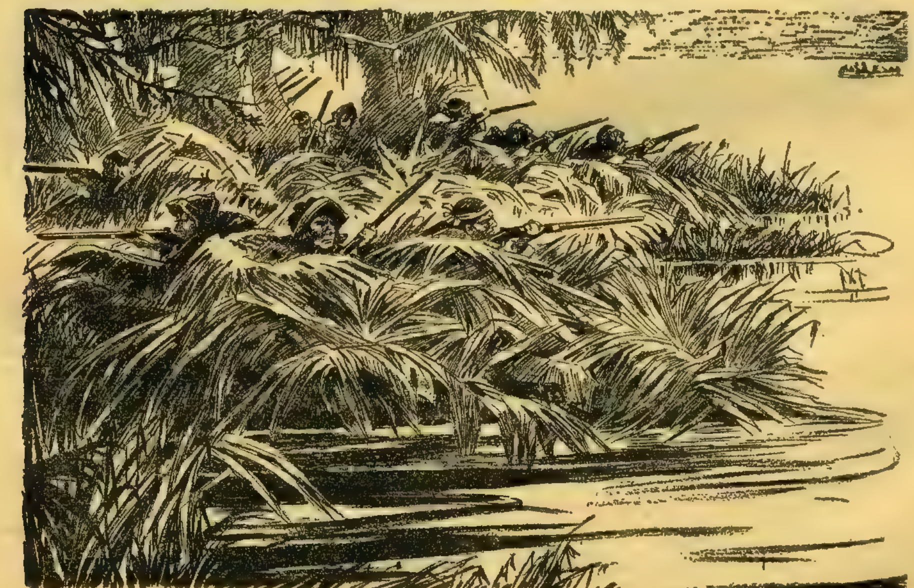
Carter said simply, "It was one of the bravest things I ever saw. God forgive me, I went through it all thinking the man was a coward."

"But I *am* a coward, sir."

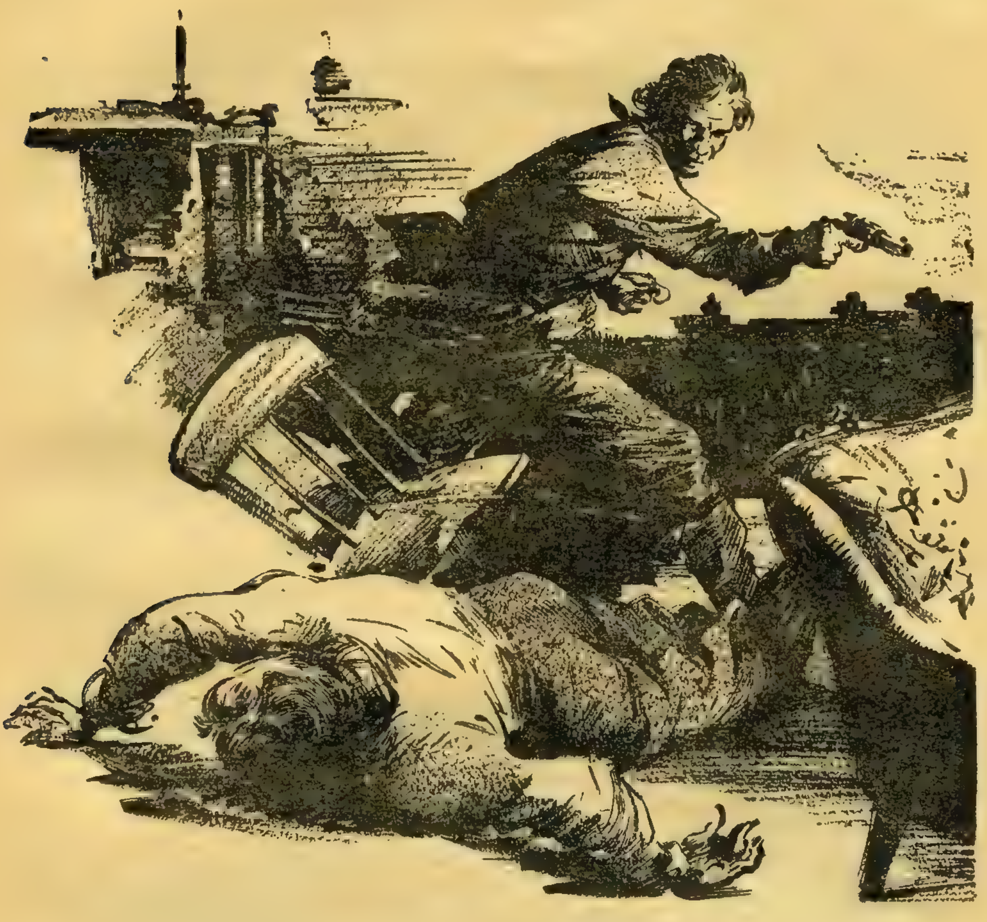
Melville Keane strode into the firelight, his armor still intact, his casque cradled in one arm. "The sort of coward who needs an audience to be brave," he explained. "Admit that the Seminoles responded admirably to my dramatic tirade on horseback."

John Carter said, "When you found a theater in the Floridas, Mr. Keane, you may count me as your patron." *You'll even sit through his Hamlet again,* he told himself severely. *Yes, and his Lear and Romeo to boot.*

Melville Keane considered. "I might linger at that," he said, with his best smile. "Who knows? Perhaps this Territory may really have a future—with men like us to keep down the rebellious element."



WHERE NESTS THE WATER-SNAKE

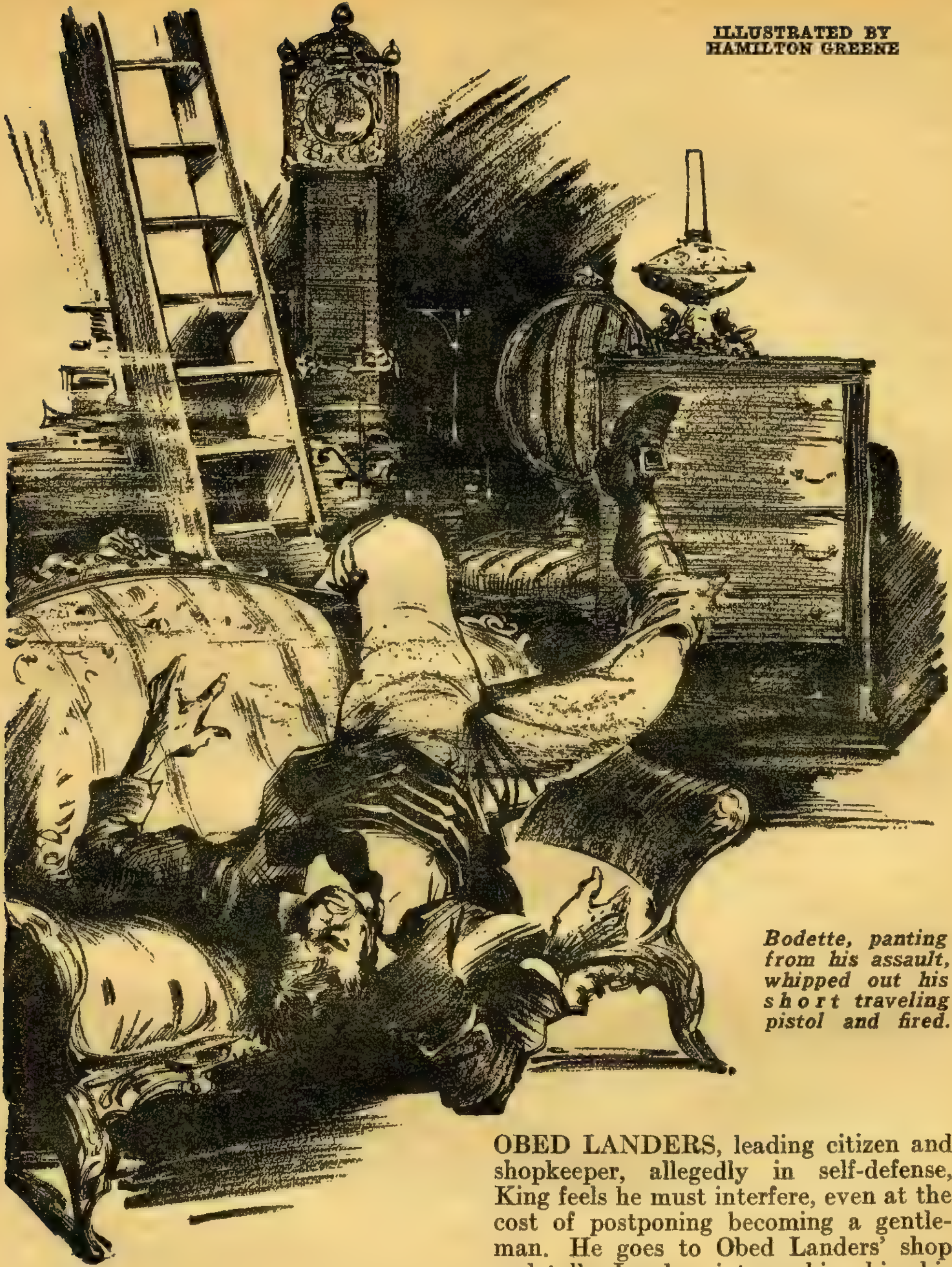


By MERLE CONSTINER

THE STORY THUS FAR:

WHEN KINGSLEY BODETTE leaves home in the Blue Rock country one fall day in 1841 to attend the Talbotsville Academy for Young Gentlemen, his father tells him not to come back until he has an education—two years, he figures it will take. But when he gets into the wild Tennessee uplands on his way to Talbotsville, King stumbles on two corpses in a clearing, murdered farm folk whose cotton stores have been looted. Then he hears from an innkeeper about a mysterious riverboat, the *Morning Star,* seen that day with a deckload of cornshocks—why would anybody be shipping cornshocks? —and a frightened, drunken painter named MR. RUBY confides in a tavern

ILLUSTRATED BY
HAMILTON GREENE



Bodette, panting from his assault, whipped out his short traveling pistol and fired.

in Talbotsville that some "respected citizen" had hired him the night before to paint out the name of the *Morning Star* and rename her the *L. G. Blount.*

Bodette enrolls in the Academy with the best of intentions, but when Mr. Ruby is murdered the same day by OBED LANDERS, leading citizen and shopkeeper, allegedly in self-defense, King feels he must interfere, even at the cost of postponing becoming a gentleman. He goes to Obed Landers' shop and talks Landers into making him his apprentice.

That same night, Landers has a secret visitor who proceeds to murder his unwilling host and dump him in the river. But not before King has eavesdropped on their conversation and learned that the mysterious caller was on his way to meet a man named FRANCHER who was taking the *L. G. Blount* to Stiles Flat on the Green River. The murderous visitor attempts to ambush King, but Bodette eludes him and rides off in the night, escaping on his own horse—already conveniently saddled by the killer—with only a flesh-wound from a stray bullet.

The next morning Bodette notices that two silver-studded saddle bags, instead of his own familiar brown ones, are hanging from his cantle. Obviously they belong to Mr. Landers' murderer.

King examines the bags and finds a big brass key and a letter addressed to "ARNOLD CULP, Esq., care of Manager, Hatton House, Natchez." It suggests that Culp visit a man named KIMBALL at Sherrill's Crossing to see if Kimball is doublecrossing the writer, one JONATHAN LAKE.

On his third day in Kentucky, Bodette comes upon a peddler's camp. The peddler, HATTON, is openly hostile, but his companion, a traveling tradesman, welcomes him. When Bodette asks the direction to Sherrill's Crossing, the peddler professes ignorance, but the tradesman remarks candidly that that was where Hatton had stocked his provisions. Bodette tells the tradesman that he's in dangerous company and warns him to leave camp immediately.

The next day Bodette comes to Sherrill's Crossing, a single house surrounded by a stockade. There is no sign of life as Bodette enters. Inside, the place is a vast stockroom filled with barrels and crates all bearing the words: JOS. CRANDON & SON, MFGRS., GALTSBURG, KY., and all filled with household provisions. The enormity of the thing begins to dawn on Bodette. This was all loot filched from isolated backwoods river merchants, sent to a way-station such as this, and then transshipped to Galtsburg. But Kimball obviously had a little business on the side, selling goods to peddlers such as Hatton. Bodette is interrupted in his prowling by Kimball himself, who holds a huge gun fixed unwaveringly at Bodette. When he tells Kimball that he is an agent sent by Jonathan Lake, Kimball confesses that he had been double-dealing, and in so doing, reveals the whole fiendish scheme which he believes is headed by *the man in the clawhammer coat.*

Eight days later, Bodette reaches MR. AINSLEY'S impressive mansion in Stiles Flat. Ainsley, a fragile old gentleman, admits him when Bodette mentions the "Steel Pen" and Bodette gathers from the reply that the Steel Pen is a man. Ainsley is entertaining a foppish young man whom Bodette recognizes by his voice as the man who had killed Landers back in Talbotsville. Still pretending to be an agent from Lake, Bodette accuses Culp of neglect of duty and proves his point by producing the brass key. Ainsley offers them drinks and shortly after, Culp falls to the floor dead. Ainsley explains calmly that he poisoned him with whiskey from a separate shelf in his cabinet, and surreptitiously, Bodette switches the bottles. Then he and Ainsley throw Culp's body in the river, and Ainsley, well pleased with his work, returns to his house to enjoy a drink in celebration.

Bodette soon reaches Galtsburg where he finds the CRANDON warehouse and discovers from local gossip that Mr. Crandon is never seen and that Mrs. Crandon is under the constant care of a DR. BRYCE.

Later that evening, he pays a visit to Mrs. Crandon and realizes then that Dr. Bryce and Mrs. Crandon are the same person and that he has been deliberately trapped. Locked in a room, he climbs out of the window and makes his way up the roof to the attic. There, he looks down on Dr. Bryce and a riverboat roustabout discussing future plans and also how to dispose of him. Bodette escapes and makes his way to Thad's Creek, where the riverboat, *Blount,* is moored. He asks for passage to Cincinnati and once aboard, meets Francher and his accomplice, PRINCEY. Bodette claims that he was sent by Ainsley and Princey lets it slip that all hiring is done in Cincinnati. They become suspicious and a fight starts in which both ruffians are killed. Bodette then sets fire to the boat and as he watches the raging inferno from the swamp, he thinks of the lonely farmhouse in the cove, of the fire which Francher and his marauders had tried to kindle by the organ. My fire, Bodette reflects bleakly, my fire burns.

PART III

THE stage road followed the convolutions of the riverbank for many meandering, tedious miles; finally, to Bodette's relief, it diagonalized inland, north-by-east, in a direct shortcut for the Ohio shore. He felt he was near the end of his extraordinary journey and his eagerness somehow communicated itself to his wiry mare. He was approaching the fringe of the northland; it was Kentucky, but a different Kentucky from that which he had passed through. The hills were stark and gaunt, the clear, apple-sweet air of autumn was mild and stimulating to his cheeks and hands.

He was about nine miles south of Covington, on the last lap of his trip, when he saw the wagon.

At first he thought it was a runaway. There was a wash in the hillside and the pike twisted around it on a narrow shoulder. He'd just stopped by a roadside spring to water his chestnut when he heard a noise like all hell banging apart and a wagon came tearing around the ledge from the north. A wagon beyond his wildest dreams. It had a bed as large as a small house, its tires were at least five inches wide and the immense structure was pulled by six frantic, maddened horses. The driver half crouched on the wildly swaying bed, snapping a twelve foot bullwhip in the air, goading his team on to greater excess. It all happened so suddenly that Bodette was almost run down.

The wagon launched by him, the driver leaned backward on the reins, and the enormous structure came to a rocking, skidding halt. The dry road exploded in an enveloping puff of dust beneath the scraping, stuttering wheels. The driver vaulted lightly to the ground. Bodette inspected him in silence; his clothes were ragged and wrinkled, his face had the texture and color of a good leaf of tobacco, his deep-set eyes were steady and blue. He said, "It simply ain't in the Settle blood to nigh run down a gentleman without'n a heartfelt apology. What part of Tennessee are you from, brother? I'm from Knoxville."

Bodette was speechless.

"Any Tennessean is a gentleman," the wagoner explained, "at least whilst he's away from home. Me an' my wagon an' my hosses apologizes. Please accept 'em, so I can get gone, suh."

Bodette grinned. "Glad to know you, Mr. Settle. I'm just another Bodette—the Blue Rock country is filled with them. How'd you know I was from Tennessee?"

"Yore pappy made yore boots."

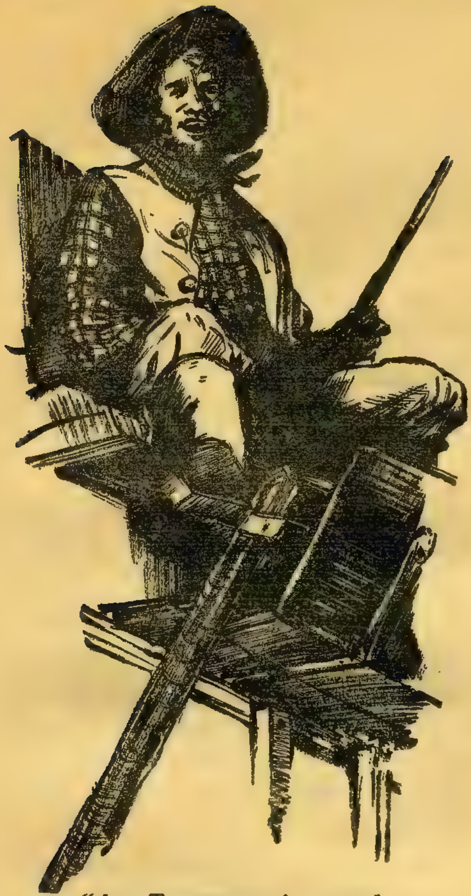
"Not my pappy. My uncle." Bodette paused. "I don't mean to pry, Mr. Settle, but what kind of a wagon is that? I never—"

"That's a freight-wagon, son. They don't have 'em in Blue Rock, do they? It'll carry many a ton of stuff; they use 'em up in Yankeeland to haul goods from Philly across the mountains to the western country. We usually travel in herds of six an' more. My wagon's empty. I just finished a haul. I'm quittin' the trade. I'm headin' for Knoxville, gatherin' up all the loose Settles I can lay hands on, and coming back no'th. We're removin' to Cincinnati!"

Bodette was horrified.

"An' you don't need to stand thur reprovin' me!" The wagoner's face lit up. "Wait till you get to Cincinnati! You'll see, then, what I mean!" A look of ecstasy broke over his weathered features. "Man! That's a city that's reely around here! Lemme tell you about her. Twenty-five year ago her population was about five thousand, six year later it was nine thousand and more. Today it's fo'ty-five thousand an' growin' by leaps and bounds. It's the most important port in the United States! Everything—rivers and roads and canals—makes it a sure play. They tell me that the folks there are gonna open trade directly with Havana and the Indies and outsmart the eastern seaports! She's due to be the biggest city in the world by the year two thousand!"

Bodette listened to this rhapsody with close attention. "Mr. Settle, I don't like to be beholden to anyone, but you're a Tennessean—"



"Any Tennessean is a gentleman," the wagoner explained, "at least whilst he's away from home. Me an' my wagon an' my hosses apologizes."

"By doggies! That's the way to talk! A Tennessean, he won't eat pie off'n nobody's finger! Consider me yore pappy, son. What can I do for you?"

"I want some advice. Seems like Cincinnati's a mighty big city. How well do you know it?"

"Like a wolf knows her whelp. By sight, sound and scent. Why?"

"I've got to see a man on Redbud Row. At a place called Number Nine. I'd appreciate it if you'd tell me the bait I'd best use."

"Redbud Row? Wow! It's them that uses the bait on Redbud Row. It's a bad neighborhood, and Number Nine's worst in the lot. It's a grocery—"

"A grocery?"

"That's right. A grog-shop. And meaner 'n rattlesnake milk. They can steal the seams right out'n yore pants an' you'll never know it till three days later." He shook his head. "Somebody's done give you bad advice. When you put up in Cincinnati, you put up at the Middle Meadow. It's a family inn at the edge o' town."

"Thank you," Bodette said. "Did you ever hear of a man there named Jonathan Lake?"

"Nope."

"One thing more, sir. I've been hearing mention of a Steel Pen. Could you inform me as to—"

The wagoner looked disgusted. "You leave them alone, son. I wouldn't be caught dead in one."

"The Steel Pen I'm referring to," Bodette explained, "is a man."

"No, son. You just ain't been around, that's all. They been prankin' you. A steel pen is a kinda gentleman's coat. It's one of them clawhammers. A genuwine two-fisted man wouldn't be seen in one; I'd druther put on a apron!"

So that was the answer! It all fitted in. Culp and Ainsley and Bryce and their Steel Pen. Kimball and his visitor in the clawhammer coat. The man that Bodette was searching for was a man in a tailed coat! How many hundreds of men in Cincinnati wore tailed coats!

The wagoner asked Bodette what might be his first name. "Well, goodbye," he said as soon as he learned it. "Just as quick as these ole wagonwheels hit Tennessee soil, I'll start spreading the word—Kingsley Bodette is safe and sound and headed for Cincinnati. Yore folks should ketch it by the middle of the next month."

He put his foot on the wheel-hub, sprang into the wagonbed, cracked his bullwhip, and was away in a screeching, clamorous rattle.

CHAPTER IX

MR. CALVERT, GROCERYMAN

AT Covington, Cincinnati's small sister-town on the Kentucky bank, Bodette crossed to the Ohio shore. From the middle of the river, as his ferry neared the docks, he viewed the sprawling city with awe and wonder. He could well understand now Mr. Settle's prophecy; it looked like the largest metropolis in the world to him right that minute. Far in the background was a sawtooth horizon of gaudy autumn hills sprawling in a lavish crescent toward the water's edge.

Within the arc of this encircling arm of wooded knobs, on a sort of double tableland, was scattered the sunny hodge-podge of the city. Literally thousands of buildings, homes and shops and public edifices—of frame and stone and brick—lay before his astonishing eyes.

Poker-faced, the young hillman stared, and the saliva in his mouth dried at the sight of the landing alone. It had a one-thousand-foot front, was paved to the water-mark, and in area was about ten acres in size. Ten acres! You could put a cabin on it, plow it up, and keep a wife and a family of six on the ground alone. River traffic extended almost to midstream. Huge steamboats en route to, and from Pittsburgh and St. Louis and New Orleans were tied up at floating wharves.

The ferry came to an easy stop; Bodette walked his mare out onto the cobblestone landing. His head spun with the confusion about him. Roustabouts hustled crates and bales, hucksters and hawkers screamed and yelled; here and there, he caught a glimpse of a lady passenger enquiring for her boat, or of the fine linen of a gentleman supervising a shipment. He saw seven clawhammer coats before he turned down Main Street into the business section.

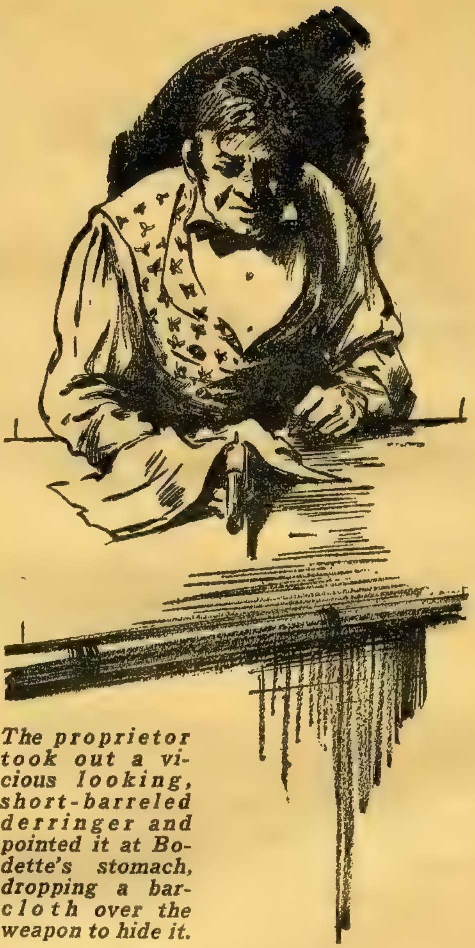
For the next half hour, he indulged himself in the pleasure of riding, criss-cross, back and forth through the center of town, taking in the sights. Main and Pearl, Broadway and Fourth, west of Main, were spectacular beyond description.

Finally, dazed at so much grandeur, he set out for the inn recommended to him by Mr. Settle of Knoxville.

To his amazement, he was forced to enquire of a dozen citizens before he struck one who had ever heard of it and could direct him.

The Middle Meadow, was not, as he had imagined, in a field; and when the wagoner had said it was "on the edge of town" he had not meant that it was located far out on the city's limits, as Bodette had supposed, but had intended to convey that it was in the heart of Cincinnati. By some subtlety of metropolitan speech the town was not the town but the center of the town, the section of financial and mercantile activity. The inn was in the edge of "town," that is, just a stone's throw from the business district.

Bodette liked the Middle Meadow as soon as he saw it. It was a small, clean hostelry in a narrow sidestreet. There were nice stables beyond the courtyard, and the proprietor, a rotund ex-farmer from the Miami Valley, had an honest,



The proprietor took out a vicious looking, short-barreled derringer and pointed it at Bodette's stomach, dropping a bar-cloth over the weapon to hide it.

competent cut to his jaw. Bodette stabled his mare, ate a hearty mid-afternoon meal of cold meat and strong, hot tea. He was tired. He'd been thirty-four hours without rest. He went to his room and slept; it was just sundown when he awoke, bathed, and started out on foot in quest of the grocery known as Number Nine on Redbud Row.

REDBUD ROW was in a basin along the riverbank. Everyone Bodette asked knew about it, and no one wanted much to talk about it. Cheap shops and dilapidated, dingy shanties thinned out into swampland. In the center of the fetid marsh was a line of shacks. They were raised above the bog on pilings; each of the sagging buildings was entirely windowless. As the young Tennessean made his way along the path through the lush grass, the sun at the rim of the far hills struck blood-red into the miasmic hollow, licking the ramshackle dens in moist, scarlet light. The little shacks on their queer stilted legs looked to Bodette exactly like shabby spiders enfolding lifeless prey in their crazy, angled arms. There was no human in sight—just the row of buildings.

The shacks bore names on their weathered siding, *McCartle's, The Pigeon, Sandy's Run,* and so forth. The fifth shanty was Number Nine. A rickety flight of seven crude steps ascended to a small platform by the door. Bodette climbed the stairs, opened the door and entered.

Inside, the place was surprisingly well lighted. Three lamps were arranged about the room; and the room, itself, was larger than Bodette would have guessed. There was a rough-sawn, enclosed counter along one wall and four or five primitive tables and benches. Bodette saw that there were five men in the grog-shop. Three rough-looking boatmen lolled at the counter, drunk, arguing amongst themselves and singing. The shopkeeper, his hands contemptuously on his hips, was listening to them in arrogant scorn.

The fifth man, a smallish, pompous chap in cheap narrow-cloth, sat by himself in a corner; he was out of tune with the rest of the picture. An inkpot and papers were on his table and he seemed to be figuring up some sort of accounts. He held the lenses of his spectacles over the paper as he wrote, as though they were reading glasses. At Bodette's sudden appearance, the boatmen stopped singing, the proprietor blinked, and the little man in the corner continued his scraping scribbling.

Bodette walked to the bar and said, "Betsy, that's my wife, she wants to know would any of you fellers care to buy some nice, fresh country eggs?"

One of the boatmen turned to his comrade, asked bewilderedly, "What's an aig, Hurricane?"

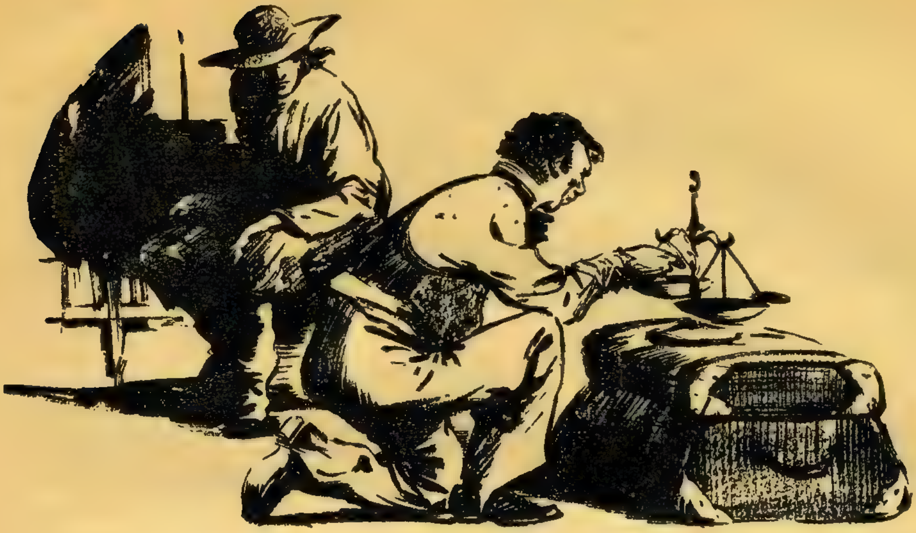
"An aig?" His friend pondered. "Don't rush me, lemme figger this out. It's hard to explain one, it's been so long sinst I seen one. When I was a bondboy, 'fore I runned away, I lived on a farm. An aig is like Joe's head there, no hair on it. It's like Joe's head oney as big as a baby's fist. Chickens goes around loaded with 'em—like a bullhead cat carries her spawn."

The first boatman looked terrified. "That-there is one of the horriblest nature stories I ever heered. No, son, we don't want to buy any little things that look like Joe's ugly head, as big as a baby's fist, no matter how fresh they are!"

The proprietor said coldly, "You boys go over and sit down." He handed Hurricane a bottle of whiskey. "Have this on me." They took the bottle and departed. The proprietor said, in heavy geniality to Bodette, "Let's have that again?"

Bodette said oafishly, "Betsy, she's my wife. She makes me hawk her wares. She—"

The proprietor was a suave, greasy man with pouched eyes. He was wearing a buff waistcoat with a glittering watch-chain and smoked a black, odorous stogy. He took a vicious, short-barreled derringer from his waistcoat pocket, laid his clenched hand on the counter so that the big bore pointed directly at the pit of Bodette's stomach. Leisurely, with his other hand, he dropped a bar-cloth over the weapon, hiding it from the view of his customers. He said quietly, "I give



The barman placed Culp's key on one side of the scales as though it were a weight, and counter-balanced it with gold pieces. It weighed out, according to Bodette's quick estimate, somewhere around five thousand dollars!

you the lie back in your face, youngster. What's your game?"

Bodette was silent.

The barman said softly, "I've got a good business here. Other fellows drop out, I keep running right along. You know why? It's because I make quick decisions. I make them and I stick to them. Something about you says you're a wrong one. You wanna talk straight to me?"

Bodette shook his head.

The barman said, "This place has more durn robberies. Only nobody ever gets anything. Always, I thwart them. I'm going to thwart you." He narrowed his fleshy eyelids. He raised his voice slightly, exclaimed angrily, "Put that gun away! What are you doing?"

The three boatmen stared. The pompous man in the corner continued with his writing. Bodette barely moved his lips; he said, "Culp isn't going to like this. If and when I tell him."

The barman goggled. "Did Arnold Culp send you here?"

"It wasn't Ainsley."

"How well do you know Culp?"

Bodette gave an insinuating laugh. "I carried him to bed a few nights ago."

"What does Culp want?"

"What does he usually want? He wants money." Bodette grew short of patience. "Maybe he'd better come and get it himself, eh? Maybe friends of Culp's aren't welcome here. I'll let him know how you feel about it."

The proprietor looked at him calculatingly, opened a flap in the counter, said, "Come along."

BODETTE followed him behind the bar, to the rear of the building, through a small door into a tiny, boxlike backroom. A sturdy, deerhide trunk took up at least half of the floor space. The barman made a routine test to be sure that it was locked, turned to Bodette. "All right, give me the key."

Bodette was beyond his depth. The only key he knew anything about was the enormous brass key that he'd taken from Culp's saddlebags. It was absurd to think that Culp's key could unlock the tiny keyhole in the trunk. The barman, observing his befuddlement, became suddenly suspicious. "If you've got the key—and you'd better have it—hand it over."

Bodette produced it. "That's better," the barman said. "I never saw such a fellow as you. Sometimes I think you're all right, sometimes I think you're running a rig. This key's good enough for me."

The barman took a small pick-lock from his waistcoat, opened the trunk. For a second, he sat there on his heels, studying a pattern of nail-scratches on the inside of the trunk lid. It was evidently some sort of record. "That's true," he said at last. "Culp's due to draw his wage."

He set out on the trunk a heavy canvas bag and a pair of apothecary's scales. He placed Culp's key on one side of the scales, as though it were a weight, and carefully counter-balanced it with gold pieces taken from the canvas sack. It weighed out, according to Bodette's quick estimate, somewhere around five thousand dollars!

The barman got conversational. "My key only pays me two thousand. Culp's a kingpin!"

"You all have keys, eh?"

"Yep. Jonathan Lake worked out the scheme. The weight of your key gives the weight of your value. You see the backend here, the handle, how funny it is with all them little curlicues? All the keys have that; it's a kind of password. Some of the boatmen have little keys, only a hundred dollars or so. I'm the paymaster. That's why I almost shot you. I gotta be durn careful." He chuckled. "There you are."

Bodette said, "Just wrap it up in a handkerchief and lay it away under the counter. Culp'll drop in for it. He'll be in a hurry and he won't want to go through all this rigmarole." He paused, asked curiously, "Who actually owns this place?"

"I'll have her all set for him," the paymaster agreed. "He can catch it on the wing any time he wants to. What did you ask me? Oh! Why, Mr. Calvert owns this place. He's the gentleman out in the front room when you came in, the gentleman writing. He was casting up our accounts. Not this stuff"—he spoke from the side of his mouth—"he was casting up the shop accounts. Come on out front and I'll make you acquainted with him. I'd best warn you, though. We never mention any of this other business before him. He always makes out like he don't know what we're talking about. He's a slick 'un."

The little man in the cheap narrowcloth suit was gone from the barroom. Bodette and the barman stepped out the door, onto the little platform. They could see Mr. Calvert's vague figure scrabbling along through the marsh grass in the gray-purple twilight. "If you step lively, you can catch him," the barman said affably. He wavered, stammered, "When I throwed that gun on you, I didn't know you was a personal friend of Arnold's. Let's forget it, eh? Arnold's a fellow to bear a mean grudge."

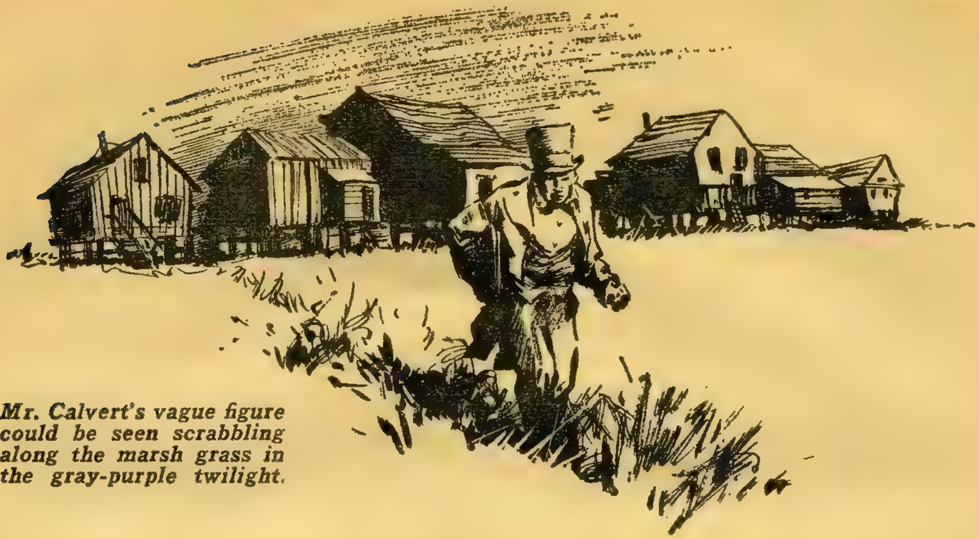
Bodette descended the stairs to the path. "Bygones are bygones. I won't mention it to him."

BODETTE, on an impulse, set himself to trailing the pompous little man. It certainly seemed as if the chase were over—as if this unbelievably priggish Mr. Calvert were none other than the sinister Jonathan Lake himself. If you used logic, he had to be. No respectable gentleman would own and operate a low dive like Number Nine. And if Mr. Calvert were a knave, it would be difficult to reconcile his association with the grog-shop in the light of pure accident. Or to believe that a secret undercurrent of roguery went on there without his knowledge. Knaves aren't easily deceived.

Firmly convinced that at last he had his man, Bodette reasoned thus: If Mr. Calvert is Jonathan Lake, the most important fact to know is the location of his quarters.

They left the swampy hollow and Bodette, a safe distance behind, followed him in the darkening evening. The young hillman was almost stunned by his good fortune. Straight as a hornet the chase had led from Talbotsville to Redbud Row, Cincinnati—from Merchant Obed Landers to this scurrying little phantom in the dusky shadows.

The little man walked fast. Bodette, keeping a careful lag, passed through a neighborhood of warehouses, in and out a warren of backstreets, through a district of small shops. Before he realized



Mr. Calvert's vague figure could be seen scrabbling along the marsh grass in the gray-purple twilight.

it, they were in the city's big business section. Down Front Street itself, they went; up Main to Fourth, and west on Fourth. Here, the stores and shops were the most elaborate of the whole town. Windows were dark, doors were locked for the night.

The little man drew up abruptly, fumbled in his pocket, unlocked a door and disappeared from the sidewalk. Bodette, some distance away across the street, gazed at the showy establishment. Its façade was of marble and freestone, three stories high, and bore a huge gilt sign: W. W. CALVERT & CO., Drygoods, Cabinet Furniture, Pottery, Importers—Exporters.

Bodette waited. Almost instantly, the little man popped out again into the night. His bundle of papers was gone.

The peregrination this time was considerably longer. They left the shopping district, wove zigzag through alleys and courts, came out at last in a district of drab, middle-class tradesmen's homes. A street of small cottages, slate-roofed, green-shuttered. Mr. Calvert stopped halfway down the block; Bodette idled at the curb. Once more the little man vanished, through a modest doorway, to reappear almost within the minute. Now, he was carrying an umbrella, though the night was clear and starry.

The fox-chase started all over again. The final lap was soon finished. The trail wound up in an exclusive neighborhood of impressive mansions. Mr. Calvert wheeled from the sidewalk; Bodette stared at the fanciful brownstone edifice: The walls of the foundations themselves were ten feet high; a double staircase, ascending in two graceful arcs of delicate wrought iron, met high above the pavement in a small dome-roofed porch. The little man pranced up the flight of spiraling steps, opened the door and entered. There was about him the manner of a man who is home after a grueling, busy day.

Bodette counted to fifty, added five more for luck, and followed his quarry up the stone flight.

He paused a moment at the massive paneled door, lifted the knocker, dropped it on its escutcheon.

CHAPTER X

JOHNNY DULAC

THE knock was answered, not by a haughty, liveried servant, but by Mr. W. W. Calvert, in person. And Mr. Calvert was having his supper. In one hand, he held a chipped mug of steaming tea, in the other was a sandwich. Mr. Calvert's sandwich consisted of a small loaf of bread cut laterally and contained what looked to Bodette like a ten inch segment of fried river-eel. For a period of perhaps thirty seconds, Mr. Calvert stood there in silence—chewing. He leaned against the door jamb so the light from the glittering hall behind him fell directly upon his guest. His eyes swept from Bodette's hide boots to his frayed, homespun jacket-sleeves. There was nothing particularly sinister in the little man's inspection; it was more, it seemed to Bodette, personal curiosity.

Mr. Calvert stowed a wad of moist bread into a sac in his loose cheek, asked, "Who are you and what do you want?"

"I'm Choctaw Charlie. I'm the biggest man south of the Arkansas River. They tell me you're the biggest man in Cincinnati. It's time we got together."

Calvert gulped. "No. Not the biggest—not me." He tried to assume a modest air, couldn't quite accomplish it. His voice was warm, friendly. "What did you want to talk to me about?"

"Peltry. I've got a dozen trappers working for me. From the lower delta to Memphis. Take it anyway you want, my skins always wind up here in Cincinnati. I figured I might as well come up myself and place a decent contract with a decent firm. I'm Choctaw Charlie, the biggest man in—"

Mr. Calvert nodded. "So you mentioned. Have you been around town long? Did you stop in at the store? I have the definite sensation of having seen you somewhere." He bowed. "Come in, sir. Excuse me while I—" He rammed the butt-end of the loaf into his capacious mouth.

Bodette followed his host into a sumptuous parlor. The pompous businessman perched himself on the edge of a fragile chair, waved to his guest to be seated. The lofty, vaulted walls were hung with huge family portraits, a rich Oriental rug covered the floor. Above Bodette's head sparkled prisms of cut quartz; galleries and archways led off from the pretentious, circular reception-room in a maze of gilt catacombs and mirrored alcoves. Bodette couldn't help thinking of Mr. Ainsley. At the far end of the room was a French piano, laid with gold leaf, and on it were three violins and a flute. Bodette commented on them. "I see you're a musician."

Mr. Calvert blushed. "Frankly, they're a mystery to me. They look nice though, don't they? They look genteel and cultured." He rubbed his palms together. "Now what's this about peltry?"

"My trappers bring the skins in to me. Up to now I've been putting them on the market as soon as they reach my hands; of late, I've worked it different. I select the choice pelts, take them to Cutler's Bend—that's a little settlement on the Cumberland—and hold them in my log warehouse; for more money. It's these select furs I want to see you about." Bodette was grave and businesslike. "How do your prices run? What do you pay?"

Calvert screwed up his face, said vaguely, "Yes, sir, if I only had a little time, Gad, if I wouldn't study music! Imagine the admiration of my staff at the store if I should pop out of my office doing glissandos on my flute some morning!" He closed his eyes, reveled in the day-dream.

"What will you offer for prime beaver?"

"Beavers? Did you say beavers? Ah, me." He beamed. "Let's don't be too mundane, let's be sociable. The beavers can wait. I rarely entertain company and your presence tonight, believe me, sir, is certainly a treat. You're from the southland, didn't you say? Have you ever been to New Orleans? Is it true that they bury their dead above the ground?"

"That, I couldn't say." Bodette showed impatience. He got to his feet. "If you're not interested in dealing with me, I'll trade elsewhere."

Mr. Calvert was embarrassed. "I'm afraid I've offended you." He chewed the corner of his lip. "This is going to be rather hard to explain, but I'll do my best. While I, W. W. Calvert, am the head of our company and have, of course, full power to negotiate any and all business, yet, out of courtesy to my good friend and general manager, I usually consult him before I make a deal. Come around to the office tomorrow morning. Mr. Jeannot Dulac and myself will be delighted to be of service to you."

Bodette started to object; Calvert cut

him off. "It sounds complicated but it's actually very simple. My father died last year and left me my business. I inherited the manager of the store—it was one of the stipulations of the will. Not that I object; I'm fortunate to have a man like Johnny Dulac around. He hasn't any business sense, to be confidentially truthful, but he's an embellishment to the establishment. I put on a big show of always treating his opinions with profound respect." Mr. Calvert puffed. "You see me at my office tomorrow morning; we'll sign this thing up. That's my word and my word's my bond; I wouldn't want you to allude to this—but Johnny Dulac's putty in my hands!"

"Dulac?" Bodette considered. "I think I had a great aunt by that name."

"Then she must have come from New Orleans. I understand that's where Johnny originated." He added casually, "You're from the southland. Tell me this: I understand that around towns like Mobile and — er — New Orleans there's a type of professional duelist, a sort of man who makes affairs of honor into a kind of career. It's actually a species of polite assassination. Have you ever encountered—"

"I've never been on the 'field'." Bodette was curt. "We trappers in the lower Mississippi just try to stay alive. And if we reach our fiftieth birthday we hold a jubilee. Is this manager of yours one of these—"

"In his past, yes. I'm afraid I must admit it. Or such is the impression I've somehow picked up." Mr. Calvert seemed self-conscious. "However, he's settled down to earning a livelihood the humdrum but honest way. Why rattle the skeleton in the closet, say? Mayhap it was just the boy's wild oats." He led Bodette to the front door, bid him a cheery good night.

SO now it was going this way! Just when he thought he'd got to the showdown, the game had taken a new twist. Well, maybe not a new twist exactly, but one thing he knew, he wouldn't feel satisfied until he'd met and talked to, and judged, this pistoleer: New Orleans Johnny Dulac. This polite eliminator. And Bodette had a hunch he knew just where to find him.

With the visual memory of a hillman hunter, the young Tennessean retraced his steps—through a labrynth of backstreets, across shadowed courtyards and along dim cobblestoned alleyways—until he came to the line of small, comfortable, tradesmen's cottages. Unerringly, he picked out the modest door, the door from which Mr. Calvert had emerged with his umbrella—and rapped.

He received a queer surprise when his knuckles struck the door. It was a cozy-looking, blue painted door, not paneled but constructed of what appeared to be flimsy, two-inch strips of beveled pine. Unconsciously, his ear anticipated a loud, noisy rattle beneath his fist. None was forthcoming. It was as though his knuckles were knocking against a brick wall. He drew back his foot, smote the door three times with the toe of his boot.

That brought a response—but the response was slow in coming.

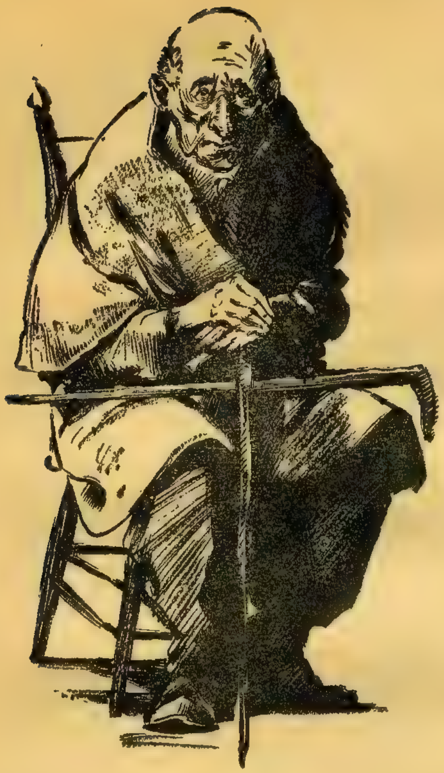
Gradually, the door swung open, and he saw how its outward appearance had deceived him. It was two feet thick and cleverly constructed of heavy planks laid side-by-side, like leaves in a deck of cards, so that only their edges were visible to the passerby on the pavement.

And the oldster who faced him timidly across the threshold was certainly not the firebrand he'd come to see.

The ancient in the doorway was stoop-shouldered and pallid. He had the gentle, wrinkled face of a tropical monkey; there was some sort of a crook in his neck that thrust his yellow, gourdlike head forward and down so that his bony lower jaw seemed to sprout directly from his hollow chest. A faded plaid gentleman's shawl was draped about his throat and came to a muddled, folded cone at the back of his pate. Bodette said courteously, "Have I got the wrong house? I want to see Mr. Jeannot Dulac."

"Come in, my child." The ancient's voice was tremulous, kindly. "I like your looks. I wish Johnny had more visitors in your mold."

Bodette waited in the hallway while the oldster completed a fantastic operation. He shoved the great door shut—and locked it. He locked it with three



The oldster's withered face showed no emotion whatever. "Don't call me Mr. Dulac, please," he said. "I've almost forgotten I have a name. My son is called Dulac. Everyone calls me aieul, *grandfather."*

chains, a bar, and two iron bolts. He half-apologized. "I know I'm foolish," he declared, gesturing at the mass of hardware. "With a brave son like Johnny in the house there's nothing to fear. I guess it's just because I'm a stranger in town. Cincinnati seems so wild and barbarous to me after the refinement of New Orleans! This way, please. My boy is frittering away his time in the study." The old man picked up two gold-knobbed canes from against the wall and, using them like crutches, hobbled onerously down the corridor; Bodette followed him.

The study was at the rear of the house. It was a small room, lined from floor to ceiling with bookshelves. Bodette had never seen, or imagined, any books like these; they were in weird, unearthly languages. Even the letters on their bindings weren't like any letters he'd ever seen—they looked like jaybird tracks.

The old man said gently, "Son, you have a visitor."

IT was hard to reconcile this foppish youth with the stories Bodette had heard about him from Calvert. He was young—not much older than Bodette himself. His hair was raven-black with an almost feminine softness, his limpid brown eyes were shuttered with long, curling lashes. His skin was milk white, without the faintest suggestion of a beard, and there were two bright spots of color on his delicate cheekbones, as round and perfect as if they had been rouged there.

He was sitting at a small table, facing a small oval looking-glass on the wall. On the table was an iron and a wonderful snow-white hat. Dulac would iron the brim for a moment, place the hat on his head, inspect himself in the glass, and go back to his ironing. "These northern hatmakers," he complained, "they can't seem to get the right dash! Everytime I purchase a *chapeau* I'm forced to revitalize it." He canted it at an angle, turned to Bodette, said, "Oh, hullo there! How do you like it?"

"I like it fine," Bodette said calmly. "If I had it I wouldn't even wear it. I'd save it for catching bullfrogs!"

The old man looked terrified.

There was a tense, strained silence. All at once, young Dulac smiled. He held the hat, fanlike, to the side of his face, said to the room at large, "Did my ears deceive me? What wit! What a charming fellow!" He addressed Bodette directly. "Why do you honor our household with your presence, sir? Is it possible that I can render you some service?"

"You can that!" Bodette was belligerent. "You can give me satisfaction. You can meet me at dawn on the Kentucky side—on the day of your choosing, with weapons of your choosing."

Dulac tilted his hat, touched the brim with his fingertips. "What brings this on?" he asked goodnaturedly. "I never saw you before."

"You killed my uncle, down in Louisiana—two years ago."

"See!" the ancient exclaimed. "See, Jeannot! I well knew your sins would follow us here!"

Dulac grinned; he was thoroughly enjoying himself. "Your proposal, I'm afraid, will have to be courteously and honorably rejected. If I may do so, I'd like to explain my situation. First: I've never killed a stray in my entire career; I know the pedigree, genealogy, and attachments of every man I've met—and believe me, your fictitious uncle is not among the enrollment. This is my first reason for denying you. My second is considerably more important. I haven't had a firearm in my hand for two years and have lost the knack. It would be suicide for me to walk out with you!"

Bodette was thunderstruck. "You haven't—"

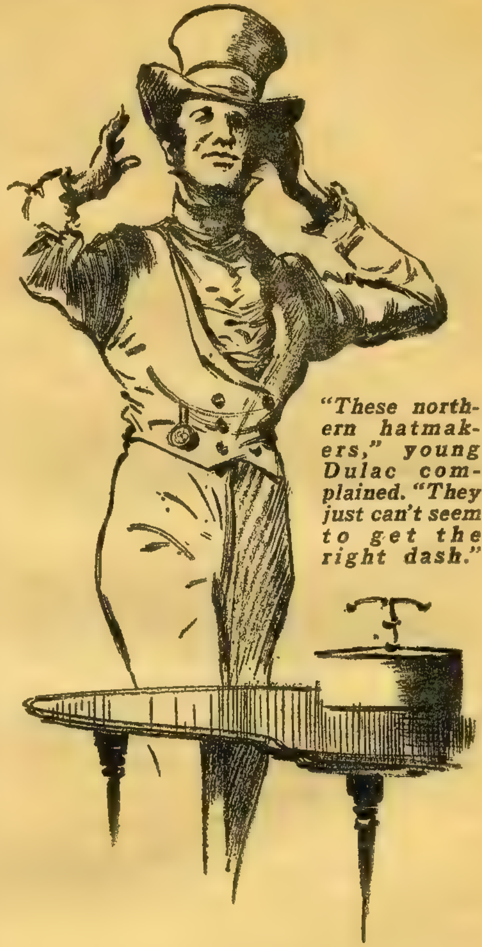
The oldster nodded his gargoyle head. "Jeannot speaks the truth. I tired of his ceaseless slaughter. I took away his pistols. We moved north. He settled down in a life of commerce. That's good. They don't make a vogue of 'affairs' here in Cincinnati. They make a vogue of the dollar. A dollar has little *honneur*—but great utility, sir."

Dulac said gaily, "Don't look so astounded. You came in, you tried to provoke me, you failed. Don't be down in the mouth. You have ambitions; you select me because of the notoriety it will bring you. You begin at the top. My father and I understand perfectly; in New Orleans, it's a familiar dodge. That, in fact, was the way I got my start." He tilted the white hat rakishly, leaned back and broke into a cascade of laughter.

The ancient said kindly, "Will you sit down—or shall I show you out?"

Bodette frowned. It was as though he were dealing with people from another world. They flabbergasted him. He said slowly, "I guess I'll be leaving. Good night."

The ancient led him down the corridor. He rested his gold-knobbed walkingsticks against the wall, unbolted, unbarred, and unlocked the massive door. He halted Bodette on the doorstep with a faltering touch on his arm. "Be honest with me, my boy. I'm an old man—tired of the fanciful embroidery that we know as life. I haven't many more years allotted to me. I do, however, like to see things clearly and distinctly; I like to know what goes on behind this temporal veil of insecurity and intrigue that we call life. Tell me, did Calvert send you here to spy on us?"



"These northern hatmakers," young Dulac complained. "They just can't seem to get the right dash."

"Yes, Mr. Dulac. He did."

The oldster's withered, gourdlike face showed no emotion whatever. "Where are you quartering in town, my boy?"

"I'm staying at the Middle Meadow, Mr. Dulac."

"That's a good hostelry. And don't call me Mr. Dulac. Please. No one ever does. I've almost forgotten that I have a name. My son is called Dulac. Everyone just calls me *aïeul*, grandfather."

He added gravely, "I don't know what goes on, it seems like this northern air befuddles me. Maybe I'm senile. Anyhow, I take your presence as a good omen. I'd like to see more of you—and often. *Adieu!*"

THAT was that.

It wasn't unfolding as Bodette had hoped; it was getting tighter. The whole thing was taking on the aspect of a fake slip-knot; you figured that all you had to do was give it a pull and it would come open. But it didn't work that way—it jammed.

There was in the back of Bodette's mind the eerie sensation that he was confronting a devilish, subtle brain. That this brain understood him perfectly while he himself was groping in the dark.

One thing he had observed on his trip across country: the closer he came to Cincinnati, the more cunning the net. Landers and Kimball were louts. And then came Ainsley; Ainsley was a fox. Next: Bryce. Bryce was even more cunning than Ainsley. And now—Cincinnati. The closer he got to the kingpin, to the mysterious, sinister Jonathan Lake, the more tangled became the trail. It was time, he decided, to consult the law.

He left the residence of the Dulacs and made his way toward the city's business section. At the corner of Main and Fourth he saw a chap in a layered cape; the fellow had a bullseye lantern and was lecturing a group of ragged gamins. Bodette spoke to him, learned that he was an officer of the watch.

The conversation turned to municipal protection. Yes, the watchman admitted, there was a wave of crime and violence; it wasn't that the town was lax in its enforcement: there was the watch, and the police, and the civil guards—and the mayor and the sheriff and the marshal. There was. . . . Where did the marshal live?

The watchman gave Bodette the marshal's address.

The town marshal, from the general atmosphere of his home, was obviously ill-paid. And to Bodette, as he sat across from him in the unkempt and odorous living-room, it seemed that the officer was about worth his wage and no more.

He was honest, certainly, and as dependable as a pair of homespun breeches, but he wasn't what Bodette would class as overbright. He was a stolid, slow-talking man with bluish popeyes and a blocky chin that was lost in a dewlap of pendulous flesh. He said pontifically, "Well, boy, let's hear the sad story. She was a sweet little girl, just like your sister, eh? But when she disappeared she had your life savings. Is that it?"

"No, sir."

"No? H-m-m! Well, then how's this? You were passing the mouth of an alley, out jumps three rogues—"

"Oh, no, sir," Bodette exclaimed in a shocked voice. "I don't want you to take anyone into custody! I just want your advice. I want the benefit of your wisdom."

"My what?"

"Your wisdom. Just a small dose of the unused portion of your—er—brainpower." Bodette thanked the memory of Mr. Ainsley for supplying the word. "I'm a stranger in town. I've come all the way up from Tennessee. I can't decide whether to go to college or to go into commerce. You're the marshal; back home the marshal is always the smartest man in town. What should I do?"

The marshal listened slack-jawed. He'd been called a lot of things but he never had been called smart. He thought it over and it made him feel mighty comfortable. He said, "They's a school here, the Cincinnati College, that ain't got no equal this side o' the mountains. It was started some years ago by Mr. Harrison—and I jest recalled he was a Tennessean, too! If I had a boy, and the funds to work it out, I'd advise him to take up college. You can't go wrong there. Now, as to mercantile establishments, the city's bloated with 'em. But clerkships and apprenticeships, to my way of thinking, is jest the same as slavery."

"You mean firms like W. W. Calvert and Company?"

"I didn't have no particular one in mind, I jest meant—"

"Oh, I see. Calvert's better than the others, then. I'm glad to know it. Do they teach finance in college?"

"No. As I get it, they teach polite

littichure and how to take a pair of scissors and snip into a human's stomach. That's anatomy and—"

Bodette glowed. "Doggone! You've talked me into it. I'm going around to Calvert and Company tomorrow morning at ten and become an apprentice-clerk. Just like you say, who wants to cut into stomachs when they can learn finance!" He looked grave. "I wonder would you come around in the morning and stand behind me."

"Well, I—"

"Thank you, Marshal. Do you, by any chance, know Mr. Calvert?"

"Yes, well—no, not pussonally. I mean, ahem, I see him here and about. And, o' course, he thus sees me. It's what you might call a intimate sight-acquaintance." The marshal coughed vaguely. "And getting around like I do, I've learned a heap about him."

Bodette was courteously attentive. The marshal went on.

"We officers of the law have knowed him around town ever since he was a sprout. We never figured him to be a topnotch business man like he's turned out. He never did anybody any harm but we just figured him sort of useless; we couldn't see the talent he had hid away behind that simple face. Last year his old man died, the man who had built up the company from a peddler's pack—died and left the whole works to young W. W. The son stepped in, made a few changes, and is doing even more business than his father had done before him!"

"Maybe it's the manager," Bodette suggested. "Maybe it's Mr. Jeannot Dulac."

The marshal hooted. "Pshaw! I don't know why Mr. Calvert keeps that feller on. Johnny Dulac come to town with a fire-and-brimstone repittashun as a pistoleer. We kept an eye glued on him. It turned out his repittashun is all hokum. He ain't been in a bit o' trouble since he arrove; he's jest a time-wasting dandy that hangs around taverns and theatres and such! Good night, son. I'll be seeing you tomorrow; I hope I ain't give you the wrong advice." He wondered hazily how he ever got into this anyway!

CHAPTER XI

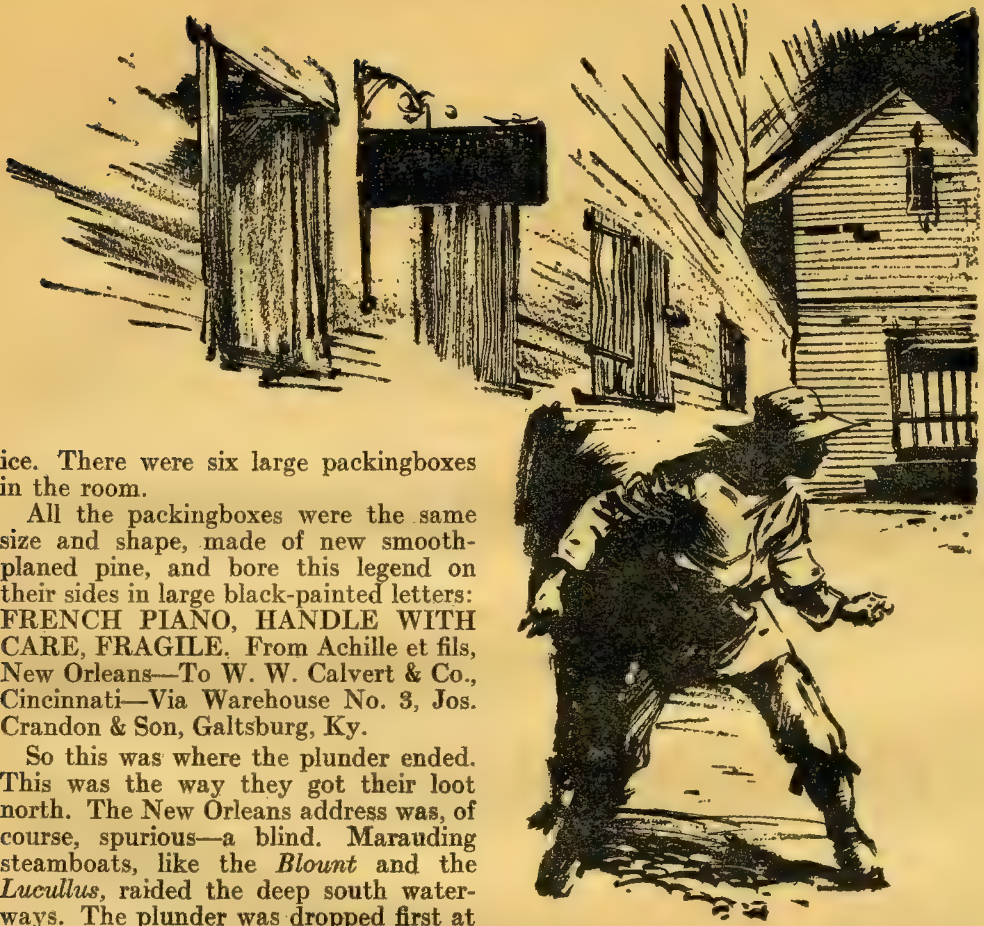
THE CLAWHAMMER COAT

THE narrow street was a black gulley of shifting shadows; the autumn moon, wreathed in a furry, opalescent haze, hung high over the slate eaves of the hulking, indistinct shop fronts. Bodette halted a moment by a flickering street lamp and considered the lay of the land. The pavements were deserted. He studied the dark façade of the three-story building, elaborate in cubed marble and freestone; barely could he make out the gilt lettering: W. W. CALVERT & CO., Drygoods, Cabinet Furniture, Pottery, Importers—Exporters. He crossed the street, penetrated into the maw of an alley, circled to the store's rear.

At the back of the store was a large paved court and loading platform. Bodette paused a moment in the moonlight, tried to decide on the best mode of entry. A shedlike structure, possibly a toolhouse, was appended to one side of the building's wall; its roof, starting from an elevation of perhaps eight feet from the ground, sloped upward to a window on the second floor. This window, Bodette observed, was open about six inches. He quirked the corners of his lips. It was frankly an invitation; it was just a little too attractive.

He located a basement sill, crouched in the darkness; in three minutes—with the aid of his hunting knife—he had the pane from its sash, and was inside. He dropped seven feet or so to a flagged floor. He froze on his hunkers, listened intently. The great building was as silent as a tomb; only the muffled night-noises of the city came faintly to his tensed hearing.

The young hillman produced a candle-end, struck fire to it, and hooded the flame with his cupped hands. And then, at the instant of illumination, he made his first important discovery. He was in a sort of sub-basement. It was a low broad chamber, newly dug, and its fresh earth was shored up with a crude patchwork of trellised timbers. The floor, on the other hand, was built for solid serv-



ice. There were six large packingboxes in the room.

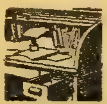
All the packingboxes were the same size and shape, made of new smooth-planed pine, and bore this legend on their sides in large black-painted letters: FRENCH PIANO, HANDLE WITH CARE, FRAGILE. From Achille et fils, New Orleans—To W. W. Calvert & Co., Cincinnati—Via Warehouse No. 3, Jos. Crandon & Son, Galtsburg, Ky.

So this was where the plunder ended. This was the way they got their loot north. The New Orleans address was, of course, spurious—a blind. Marauding steamboats, like the *Blount* and the *Lucullus,* raided the deep south waterways. The plunder was dropped first at such way-stations as Kimball's at Sherrill's Crossing, to be transshipped to Warehouse No. 3 at Galtsburg. At Galtsburg it was crated, labeled, and sent on the last, and most dangerous lap, to Cincinnati.

Curiously, he glanced inside an open box. It contained a miscellany of just about everything that was salable. There were window panes, cheap green glass and fine white flint; there were cut and wrought nails by the bag. Tinware, stills, tea-kettles, dirks and gunlocks, carriage mountings and plated saddlery. There was some precious stuff, too: silverware, watches and clocks, enchased swords. This last stuff made the blood flow angrily through Bodette's sultry cheeks; silverware, swords and watches—these were personal property, these had come from some ravished home.

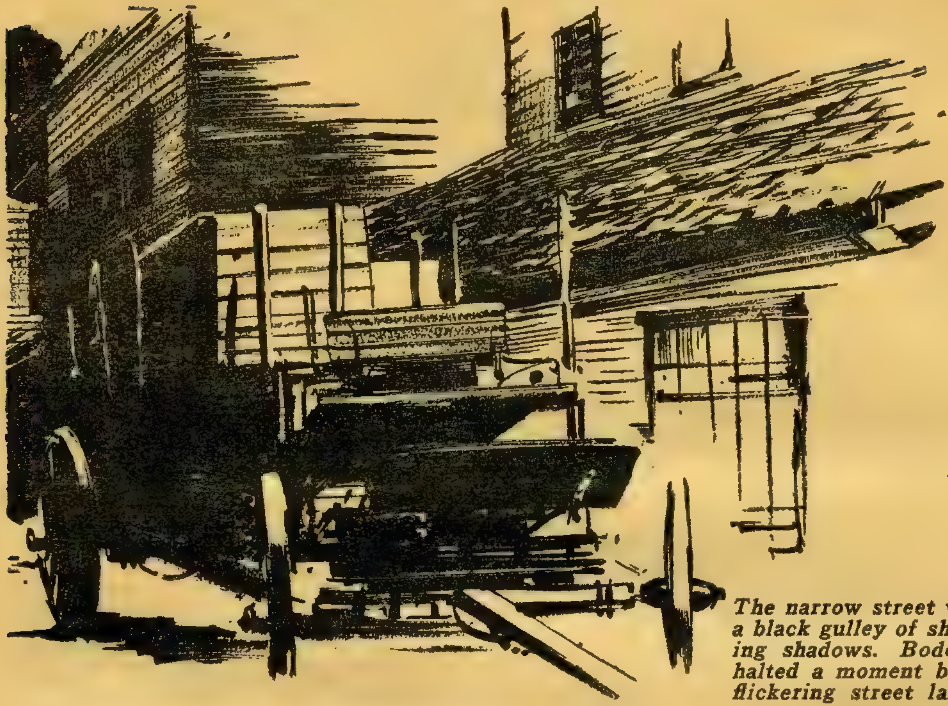
And hanging from a corner of one of the crates, like a vile, malformed creature of flesh and bones, was a shabby, clawhammer coat.

The clawhammer coat! *The Steel Pen.*



BODETTE left the cellar, came out into a passageway. At the far end of the tunnel he found stairs. He climbed three flights—past the basement proper, past the shop's main floor—and discovered himself in an alcove on the second story. He began a slow and detailed inspection of this second floor. For the most part, this level seemed a warren of neat, well-organized stockrooms. At the building's rear, however, just beyond the stair-landing, was a room that interested him.

It was a large, magnificent office, and



The narrow street was a black gulley of shifting shadows. Bodette halted a moment by a flickering street lamp.

contained two impressive carved walnut desks. Bodette sauntered to the window; it was partly open. He looked out onto a sloping rooftop and recognized it as the window he had seen from the loading-court. The flickering light of his candle caught a glint of blue steel from the window sill. Curious, he investigated. A row of three holes had been bored into the broad window frame, three on each side. Set within the frame and sticking an inch or so out of these holes, were the ugly snouts of six pistol barrels. Like gunports on a frigate. Six wires ran from a slot in the frame to the window sash. A wicked and effective burglar trap. There was something about it that Bodette didn't like. He didn't like that partly open window; it was an invitation to death. It wasn't simply a protection; it was a lure. The brutality of the contraption was characteristic of the devilish mind that Bodette had been up against all along. He turned to the desks.

The first desk was almost a joke; it was completely empty but for three unbusinesslike objects in the top drawer: a couple of beauty aids, a phial of Extract of the Queen of Sheba and a jar of Parisian Cream Oil, and a deck of playing cards. This, evidently, was the mercantile sanctum of Johnny Dulac.

The other desk—Calvert's—was a topsy-turvy chaos of documents and bills and statements. The workbench of a harried, prosperous merchant.

Between these desks was a rack holding a set of clothbound ledgers. Bodette grinned. He picked up the last book in the line, looked at the last page bearing an annotation at the last item on the page, and found precisely what he'd hoped to find.

This was the end of the chase.

Here, in a few hastily written lines, the master-brain behind all this plundering and slaying had inadvertently betrayed himself. He'd suspected Bodette—but he hadn't been sure. And this indecision, this wavering between greed and safety had tolled the bell of his doom. It was all over now.

Bodette replaced the ledger, left the office and returned to the stairs.

When he came to the ground floor landing, he had an impulse to take a quick look at the great store's showroom.

There was no reason in his mind at all for this, it was simply his perpetual hillman's curiosity. He extinguished his candle and stepped through a doorway.

Even in the obscurity of the faint moonlight, he could sense the grandeur of the vast room. There was not just a counter along one wall, and shelves, as he was accustomed to in country shops. This was on a gigantic scale; there were many counters, and aisles between them, and glass display-cases. In the play of moonglow through the costly show-windows, he made out all manner of expensive and fascinating things: bolts of cloth and imported teapots and porcelain statuettes. Moonlight glazed a bright silver teapot.

Suddenly he stiffened. Abruptly, as he watched, the teapot turned from a luminous glaze to a dull, drab gray.

A black blurred figure, the form of a man, arose silently from behind a showcase. Just in time, Bodette checked himself on the point of rushing from the room. The body of the man was silhouetted against the moonlit show-window; he was unarmed, bent slightly forward in an attitude of listening. He was unarmed—yes—but there was something horribly evil and malignant about him.

Bodette knew that at last he was face to face with the water-snake, that he was confronting his loathsome enemy at last in his true, deadly character.

Gradually, as Bodette stood there, the truth dawned on him. He, himself, before a background of shadows, was invisible to the man. The man hadn't seen or heard him—he was simply poised waiting for him. The man had anticipated his visit to the shop. But Jonathan Lake had made an error in judgment. He'd reckoned that Bodette would enter through the front door. No doubt the front door was unlocked, an invitation to enter. An invitation just like the gun-rigged window upstairs in the office.

Silently, Bodette withdrew into the blackness behind him. He groped his cautious way to the cellars, left the building by the basement.

The guests at the Middle Meadow Inn had retired by the time that Bodette returned to his quarters. The parlor was deserted but for the proprietor asleep in a chair by the fireplace. The boy crossed the dim half-light of the common-room, entered his small cozy bed chamber.

His lamp was burning on the shelf. His bed was turned down, waiting for him. There was a tray of cold food on the stand. And the crooked-necked oldster, the ancient M. Dulac, was sitting on a bench in the corner.

The *aïeul* had a sweet, seraphic smile on his withered lips, his two gold-knobbed canes lay across his knees. He said, "Bless you, my boy. I'm glad to see you. This is an intrusion, I know. But we must dispose of apologies. I've come to warn you. You are in grave danger!"

Bodette remarked politely, "Thank you, sir." He looked incredulous. "Me, in danger? Do you mean I've gone and caught some kind of contagious sickness, like the plague?" He smiled. "I feel mighty fine!"

The old man's bony jaw wriggled on his hollow chest in ominous excitement; he hunched his plaid shawl about his warped shoulders. "This is more fatal than the plague. It's Jeannot. He got a pistol somewhere. I'm afraid he's on your trail."

BODETTE talked to the oldster for almost an hour, Bodette claiming that the ancient was needlessly worried, the old man holding that he knew whereof he was speaking. Other than the oft-repeated warning, old M. Dulac had little other information to offer. Just when Bodette would be on the verge of learning the specific details of the oldster's errand, the ancient would be taken with a sudden flow of loose, garrulous phrases that only confused the issue.

The queer story that the old man presented, boiled down, was this: shortly after Bodette had left their home, Johnny Dulac had also departed—returning after a brief interval with a pistol which he flaunted before his father. The father had asked him what he intended doing with it and Johnny had said that he'd changed his mind, that he was going to look up Bodette and give him the satisfaction that he had demanded. He'd said further that he hated doing it as he'd formed an affection for Bodette, a charming fellow, but that the longer he thought about it, the more he realized that his honor had been deeply wounded by his rejection of Bodette's challenge. The old man had admonished him and reminded him that gentlemen's dueling pistols came in pairs. To which Johnny had replied that Bodette, while a witty and charming fellow, was obviously no gentleman and was due to be shot, ambush-style, on sight.

Bodette finally quieted the old man and, after thanking him again profusely, led him to the door and bade him good-night for the second time that evening.

The young Tennessean undressed and went to bed. He was asleep almost as soon as his head struck the bolster.

The next morning was bright with canary-yellow sunshine. Bodette arose and bathed, went out into the tavern parlor and had breakfast. Within the next few hours this whole business would be over, the slate would be washed clean. He paused at the inn's door, passed a few brief pleasantries with the proprietor about the fine weather, and set out for Mr. W. W. Calvert's.

The crisp fall air brought tradesmen and their customers alike out on the pavements. Everywhere there was an atmosphere of good feeling and merry friendship. The cart-boys, with their quarters of fresh butchered beef, bakers with their shaved heads and white starched aprons, the shoulder-hucksters with their trays of berries and squash and glossy carmine apples—the entire milling, shouting, laughing crowd seemed caught in a mood of high spirits and geniality. Bodette felt himself suddenly a part of the great metropolitan bloodstream and, to his surprise, liked it.

He found himself nearly smiling at complete strangers.

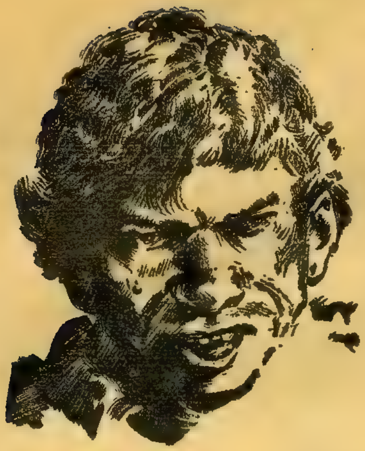
Beneath the golden impact of the autumn sunlight, Mr. Calvert's mansion was even more impressive than it had been to Bodette the night before. He halted a moment on the curb and tried to memorize it—it was something he'd have to write to his mother about. It ascended from the sidewalk, in a fancy wall of austere brownstone, three stories to an ornate gabled roof. The entire ground story was windowless foundations, but the facade from the second story to the eaves was a pattern of windows of all varieties—bays and lancets and dormers. Back in Blue Rock, glass was expensive; if a farmer had two windows in his cabin he spent his spare time going around trying not to brag about it to his neighbors.

Bodette climbed the steps to the little front porch landing, dropped the knocker on its shield. There was no response. He waited a moment, repeated the operation. Mr. Calvert must be at the office, the boy decided, but you'd think that a man of his prominence would at least have servants. After a second's hesitation, Bodette descended to the pavement.

There was a narrow, paved passageway between the building and a stone wall; a man came around the side of the house, out of this alley, to the sidewalk. He was carrying a bucket and a broom. He swished water from the bucket on the stone steps, gave them a vigorous scrubbing with the broom. He was a skinny man with loose, blubbery lips; he was dressed, in a ragtag fashion, after the manner of a footman. He ignored Bodette completely. Bodette noticed right off that his shoes weren't mates; one of them had a large squarish buckle and the other had a small oval buckle. The footman's shoes, like the rest of his garments, looked like they'd been assembled from an assortment of cast-off livery.

And progressively, as Bodette watched him at his enthusiastic charwork, the young Tennessean had the sensation that he had seen him before, under perilous circumstances. At first, it was just a disturbing impression. Then he placed him.

THIS man, this footman, was the rough-looking boatman that he had spied upon in the attic of the old house at Galtsburg. He was one of Francher's bloody crew, the runner who had been sent from the *Blount* to Dr. Bryce for assistance when the steamboat had split her valves. Bodette gave a farewell glance at the



Bodette's assailant was a husky fellow, a typical gin-house felon.

face of the mansion, sighed, and pretended to walk away.

The footman leaned on his broom, said deferentially, "Ah, a beautiful day, is it not, sir?"

Bodette nodded curtly. The footman went on affably, "Don't go and tell me you've been up and knocked for Mr. Calvert? The master is below-stairs just now, a-countin' his menials, and he's hard of hearin' so—"

Bodette said briskly. "That's all right. I'll come back."

The footman pursed his thick lips. "I hain't sure just how the master will take it—but if your business is important, I'll lead you to him."

The young hillman looked doubtful. "I don't want to trouble. . . ."

"It won't be no trouble. I'm glad to do it!" The footman made a gawkish curtsy. "Just foller me, sir."

Bodette followed the man down the passage; about halfway, he pulled up, said, with an unconvincing show of servility, "This-yere's the servants' entrance. It hain't right to ask a caller to use the servants' entrance, but—"

"It's all right with me," Bodette remarked blandly. "They all lead to the same place, don't they?"

The tattered footman opened the door and they stepped inside. As Bodette crossed the threshold, he rubbed his fingers laxly along the heavy brass lock set in the door-jamb. The brass was rough and sharp beneath his fingertips; just as he imagined, the door had been forced—he could feel the burr of the scarred metal.

They were in what had at one time been the mansion's kitchen; now it had been converted into a sort of toolshed and general utility room. The whitewash was peeling from the rough stone walls and in the sunlight, from the wooden-barred windows, cobwebs draped and fluttered from the raftered ceiling like filaments of minute golden beads. The spurious footman closed and bolted the door. Bodette observed casually, "Say, the buckles on your boots don't match! You'd think a rich man like Mr. Calvert could afford to dress his servants properly. Excuse me, if I seem rude."

The footman batted his eyes. "My left shoe, the one with the square buckle, has gone to the cobblers. I jest borried this other'n from—"

"I see." Bodette was thoughtful; he glanced carelessly about him. The room was cluttered with odds and ends of broken furniture: a few chairs, an old mahogany secretary, a delapidated three legged sofa. At the far end of the room a ladder rested against the wall, and at the top of the ladder was the black aperture of an open trapdoor. "Yes," Bodette said calmly, "yes, you think you've got me locked in, my friend—but maybe you've got your parties mixed. *I've got you locked in!*"

The ruffian shifted nervously on his feet, said, "I don't know what you're talkin' about. I'm jest a pore—"

"I know. I know all about you and I'm glad to see you. I've chased you and your bloody boatmates through three states. Francher and Princey I've met, but you've been saved for me. How did you leave Dr. Bryce at Galtsburg? How'd he take the burning of the *Blount?* It was a little hard on his nerves, wasn't it?"

A NEW light, a cold, brutal gleam crept into the ruffian's tiny eyes. He threw off all verbal attempt at disguise. "I'm glad to see you, too, Cap'n. You done us a heap o' damage—but we got you all figgered out by now. You was the feller that stole Culp's key. You was the feller that gulled Kimball and somehow kilt Ainsley. It was you that was in the old Crandon house when I was thur with Bryce. Now you tell me that it was you that fired the *Blount.* Yessir, you done us a heap o' damage—but you're all set to pay up. And don't reach fer no pistol because powder and shot won't save you now."

His eyes, avoiding Bodette's gaze, fastened themselves on Bodette's breastbone. He seemed perfectly self-confident, assured; like a man embarked on something that couldn't go wrong. His hands hung limply at his sides, his loose mouth V'd upward in cunning anticipation. "You asked to see Mr. Calvert, didn't you? Well, I'll jest find out if Mr. Calvert's to home."

He wheeled, turned his back to Bodette, and walked to the ladder.

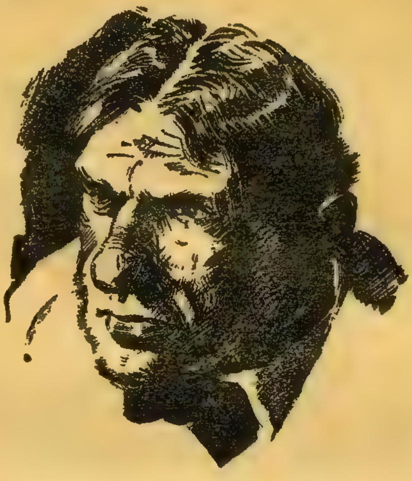
The boatman put his foot on the bottom rung of the ladder, raised his head to the trapdoor above him and called softly, *"Now's the time!"*

Bodette heard the faint scuffle behind him—but too late.

He hunched, pivoted, and caught the glancing blow of a sandbag on his shoulderblade. The crushing impact staggered him, almost felled him. It'd been a sly ruse, a trap within a trap; his second assailant had been concealed behind the old mahogany secretary—the ladder had been simply a lure. He found himself confronting a city rough, a typical ginhouse felon. A husky fellow, and grinning, with a crusty green scum on his fang-like teeth.

The rough, unbalanced momentarily from the momentum of his frenzied swing, took three little steps to check his hurtling attack, threw back his arm for a second blow. Bodette rushed directly into him.

The young Tennessean fought woodsman-style. Fierce and violent—and fast. He swung backhand, overhand, and from the knees; and in every blow he put the weight of his blocky chest as though he were heaving logs. The rough crumpled beneath the wild battering; his face went pulpy red. He was out as he hit the floor. It was over almost as soon as it began; from first to last, the young hillman had smote him but six times in half as many seconds.



"The master is below-stairs just now, a-countin' his menials."

The footman was scrambling about, in and out of the litter of broken furniture. He had a rusty-barreled salt-and-pepper in his hand, was waving it back and forth trying to get a clear shot at Bodette without jeopardizing his accomplice.

Bodette, stocklegged, and panting from his assault, whipped his short traveling-pistol from his tunic and fired. A cone of shattered bone appeared over the footman's eye. He collapsed, backwards, over the dilapidated, broken-down sofa.

That, he realized grimly, that is the last of the notorious *Morning Star* and her plundering, murdering crew.

He saw a shaded glen in a cove by a slow-moving southern river. He saw three hounds, belly-up on the lawn; he caught the image of a small farmer and his gentle-faced wife, twisted in death on their living-room carpet. By now, their neighbors had found them and buried them; by now dark cedars grew over their crude backwoods tombstones, mockingbirds sang above their sodded mounds.

Now that was all taken care of.

He stood for a moment in the gay autumn sunlight, in reverence. He felt the presence of his father; he seemed to feel again his father's handclasp as they parted at the cornerstone, seemed to hear his father's voice. "Good luck. Be honest and courteous—for your mother's sake. And, by God, hold to your countenance for mine!"

Solemnly, Bodette left the mansion, started for town and the drygoods store of W. W. Calvert and Company, Importers—Exporters.

CHAPTER XII

WHERE NESTS THE WATER-SNAKE

BODETTE'S acquaintance of the previous evening, the helpful town marshal, was lolling in the lobby of the shop waiting for him. He saluted his young friend with a broad grin; together, they entered the store.

The grand showroom hardly seemed the same place that Bodette had witnessed in the moonlight. Then it was sombre and funereal; now in the flash and gleam of the volleying sunshine, it was a busy hive of swarming clerks and casual customers. The marshal spoke to a bustling salesman, the salesman delegated a package-boy to lead them to the owner. They wove through a maze of aisles, reached the stairs, ascended to the second floor. The package-boy left them by the door. "I doubt if he'll see you," the urchin warned. "Mr. Calvert's a man that can ack mighty busy when the notion strikes him!"

It was Johnny Dulac's voice that answered their knock, invited them in. He brightened at the sight of Bodette and gave him a friendly wave of greeting; he didn't conduct himself like a man who'd vowed to ambush you.

They were at their desks, the two of them, Calvert and Dulac. They had both been idle at the instant of the entry but the rotund merchant, when he observed he had callers, went into a flurry of action: he signed papers at a terrific rate, jammed them in pigeonholes, totaled up long columns of figures. "Come in, come in," he said brusquely. "I'll give you a moment just as soon as I—" He resumed his calculation.

Dulac said lazily, "Good-morning, gentlemen. Make yourselves at home. If you've come to interview the proprietor, as I presume, then you'll have to allow him to set the stage properly." He rolled his fine eyes ceilingward, murmured, "Business, business, business! What a way to get prematurely gray! Do I speak wise words, *mon père?*"

Bodette turned his head slightly, observed for the first time that the office held a third occupant: the *aïeul.*

The ancient sat quietly, almost timidly, in a far corner of the room. He sat on a straight-backed chair, against the wall, and his pair of heavy walking-sticks rested in their accustomed position, across his knobby knees. There was a look of alarm in his eyes, a look which said as plain as words to Bodette, "Don't, for goodness sakes, mention my visit with you at the inn last night!"

Calvert finished his sum, jotted down the total; he leaned back pompously, said, "How are you, my boy? Why do you bring the marshal with you?"

"The marshal's here to make an arrest," Bodette said quietly. "I'm going to point the finger and he's going to do the rest. I'm afraid, Mr. Calvert that this is the end of W. W. Calvert and Company!"

Calvert looked stupified. "Are you accusing me of something?"

"I meant that it's not likely that the firm will survive the shock. I'm not accusing anyone of anything until I tell the marshal exactly why he's here."

Bodette formed a new opinion of the officer; he didn't seem too surprised. He said stolidly, "You know, boy, I was wonderin' about you last night after you left. I'm kinda curious about this-here. Jest what are you a-hintin' at?"

"WE'RE standing right now in the presence of a master-criminal." Bodette spoke slowly and firmly. "The country's been on fire the last five years with buying and selling and banks and finance. City folks have been half-mad with the idea of commerce. Money seemed to be growing on trees! Well, here in Cincinnati there was a man who figured out a scheme to get dog-rich without risking anything in speculation."

Over in the corner, the oldster waggled

his gourdlike head, made sucking noises of disapproval. "Tsk, tsk, tsk! Mammon is a false god!"

Bodette went on, "The thing this man had to do first was to get hold of an outlet, a nice big merchandise establishment like W. W. Calvert and Company. That gave him a kind of a duck-cover for his hunting. It gave him more than that, too, it gave him respectable advantage of markets."

Dulac took his bottle of Extract of Queen of Sheba from the desk drawer, daubed a little on his forehead. "But all that sounds like good enterprise—there's nothing illegal about that."

Bodette ignored him. "Here's the way the scheme worked, marshal. Hold your breath, it's pretty bad. This man, this organizer, assembled a crowd of cutthroats. They acquired steamboats, small vessels with shallow drafts and powerful engines; some of these boats they bought, others they stole. I'll tell you all about that later. Cincinnati is a town that's growing by leaps and bounds. Why is that, marshal?"

"It's because of trade," the marshal answered quickly. "We're the biggest city north of New Orleans that's west of the mountains. Take all them southern states. Where do they git their supplies? They git 'em from us. We ship—"

"That's the answer," Bodette explained. "Here's the way the scheme worked. This master-thief sent his murderous shallow-draft steamboats into southern rivers; they raided not for money but for merchandise. Merchandise in Cincinnati is gold. These boats unloaded their stolen freight at hidden way-stations and set out to loot again. From the way-stations, this plunder was transshipped back to Cincinnati to be resold." He paused. "And here's where the stolen goods ended its circuit. Right here in W. W. Calvert and Company."

Calvert looked scared. "That's preposterous! I have my business at my fingertips. I sit at this desk twelve hours a day. All this is information to me!"

Johnny Dulac lowered the lids of his dreamy eyes, said, "I, too, spend a great deal of my time in this establishment. Would you be good enough to clarify your astonishing charge?"

Bodette flushed. "Nevertheless, I speak the truth. Marshal, you'll find a secret basement in this building. A cellar under a cellar. That basement, this moment, is stocked with stolen property. One look at it and you, an officer of the law, will recognize it as such."

The *aïeul*, on his chair, appeared mildly disturbed. "Think of that. My good-

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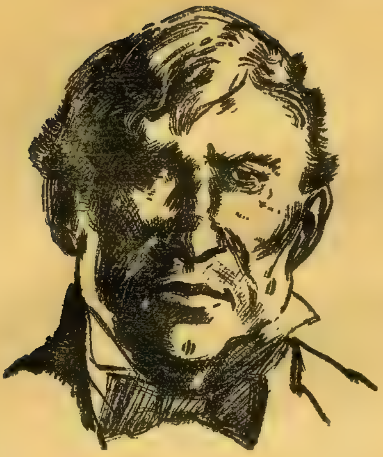


"Son, I can't hardly believe what you're sayin'. You better begin provin' your words," said the marshal to Bodette.

ness! Mr. Calvert, can you explain this? The young man is directing a serious charge against you."

The pompous little man was completely deflated. "Give me a minute! I can explain everything!"

Bodette said, "The whole business swings around one point." He turned to the harried Calvert and asked calmly now, "Why is this Johnny Dulac in your employ?"

"I can answer you that," the marshal declared. "Mr. Calvert's daddy stipulated in the will that he had to carry Dulac on—"

"I've been told the same," Bodette retorted. "But I don't believe it. I think it's a story Calvert put out for some particular reason. Mr. Calvert, I repeat my question. Don't falsify; you know we can go to the court-house and read for ourselves."

Calvert wilted. "It's just as you say, it's a story I made up. It was the best I could do." He whispered, "Don't press me just now. I've got a bad heart. I feel faint."

"Here's another story," Bodette said. "How does this one sound? Say your father died and left you this enormous store. You were known to be something of a weakling. The rumor got around. One morning a gentleman appeared here in the office. A gentleman who looked astonishingly like Johnny Dulac, there. This gentleman had a bad reputation as a pistoleer. He talked with you quietly for a few minutes and when he finished you were wet with cold sweat—and had acquired a manager."

"So help me," Calvert muttered. "It was just like that. He didn't actually threaten me but there was something about him; he was entirely different—I can't put it into words. He was ghoulish!"

"Ghoulish?" Johnny Dulac frowned amusedly. "That's a strange expression. I've killed many a man but I can't recall ever having dug one up and devoured him."

The oldster put his two canes on the floor, prepared to arise. "Jeannot, I don't like the trend of the conversation. We will now depart."

"Not yet," Bodette ordered. "Sit down." He continued his discussion with the rotund merchant. "I just offered that as another story. It's as false as yours. It's the one you so carefully built up in the mind of the public for such a moment as this, when you might need it. Mr. Calvert, sir, I charge you formally with murder, robbery and arson!"

CALVERT attempted an unsuccessful smile, gave it up. "I-I-I don't seem to understand. How could I possibly have done all these things you've been saying?"

"You're the head man, you're the Steel Pen." Bodette was grim. "You took over your father's establishment. I'll wager you actually killed him. You took over the shop and began putting your plan into action. You're a careful man, you do everything the safe way. First off, you selected a scapegoat to take the blame if you ever should be caught. You scouted around and located Johnny Dulac, here; he had the sort of reputation that the police would be interested in. You're a respectable merchant, he's a blackguard, an assassin."

Dulac laughed. "Just listen to him! He puts me in stitches! So witty—what a charming fellow!"

"You didn't know I existed," Bodette said, "until I finally got to Cincinnati, and then you caught on. I could tell you things about your organization right now that you haven't learned—Culp's dead, Ainsley's dead."

Calvert shook his head. "I never heard the names before—"

"Your grocery, Number Nine Redbud Row, is your pay-off station. When I stopped by yesterday evening, I found you there. You didn't know who I was but you were suspicious of me. You led me on a goose-chase, as a test. First here to the store, and then to the home of the Dulacs. You made a pretense of borrowing an umbrella; you wanted me to consider the Dulacs as involved in the affair." He turned to the ancient. "That's right, isn't it? He borrowed your umbrella?"

"Yes," the oldster agreed. "And the night was clear and starry. It bewildered me."

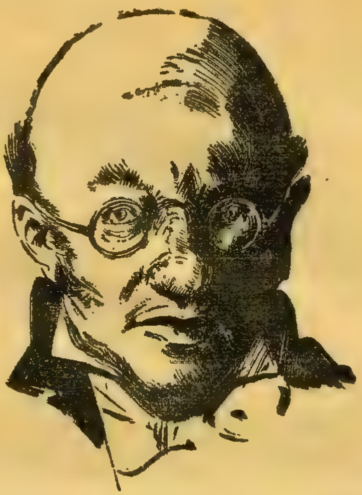
"I think, Mr. Calvert," Bodette said gravely, "that you're about the smartest man I'll ever meet if I live to be a hundred and ten years old! Almost everything I've done, you've guessed it beforehand. You knew I was coming here to the store last night and you waited down in the show-room for me; but I came in the back. And this morning. You figured I would come around to your house. You set out that fake footman and that rough to kill me."

"I have no footman!" Calvert was triumphant. "Everyone knows I'm too stingy to have servants!"

"Sure-sure. Well, as I was saying, you set out the footman to lure me into the workroom and kill me. You play everything two ways—for safety's sake. You considered the possibility that I might escape from them; you had them force the lock on the door so you could show it to the police and argue yourself out of the thing if I got away and reported it."

The marshal was worried. "Son, I can't hardly believe what you're sayin'. Mr. Calvert ain't the smartest man I ever met—by a longshot. You better begin provin' your words or you'll git us both in trouble!"

Calvert smiled magnanimously. "Don't be alarmed, Marshal. I'm not the man to bear a grudge. Just take this strange youth out of my office and I'll forget the whole thing. I'm a busy man."



"I have no footman!" Calvert exclaimed triumphantly. "Everyone knows I'm much too stingy to have servants!"

"You're as smart as a vixen," Bodette repeated stoically, "but you made one bad blunder. And that blunder will hang you!"

A great silence fell over the room. Bodette walked to the rack between the desk. He took the last ledger in the line from its resting-place, turned to the last page and showed the inscription to the marshal. The hastily scrawled script read: Cf. *Lucullus* to stop at Cutler's Bend. Furs in log warehouse. N.B. This may be mare's-nest—but worth investigating!

"What's it mean?" The marshal grimaced.

"Last night, when I visited Mr. Calvert in his home, I told him there was a stock of select furs cached at Cutler's Bend. Now he suspected me at the time but he fully realized that he actually had no reason to do so; his sole suspicion of me was based on my following him home from the grog-shop. If my tale of peltry were true—here, then, was a real haul. Greed got the better of him. When he came down here last night to wait for me, he made a note in his ledger; as I said, he plays everything both ways. The *Lucullus* is one of his marauding steamboats. Am I right, Mr. Calvert?"

Calvert pondered. "So I blundered!"

"I'd have got to you sooner or later anyway." Bodette was modest. "They tell me I've got a stubborn nature."

"Who in the world are you? Why do you—"

"You wouldn't understand. It's about some dead folks way down in the Tennessee hills—some of Francher's work."

Lines of hate creased the merchant's face. Lightning quick, his pudgy hand flicked to his waistcoat. A shot cracked. He slumped over his desk.

THE *aïeul* was sitting hunched slightly forward in his chair. In his delicate blue-veined hand he held a long, octagonal-barreled dueling pistol. The pistol was of beautiful workmanship, inlaid with gold. The ancient said softly, "He was about to cause us damage. But that is not why I shot him. I shot to kill him."

Johnny Dulac exclaimed. "The pistol, *mon père,* it is mine! You told me you dropped it in Lake Pontchartrain!"

"Speaking of lakes," Bodette said, "did anyone present ever hear of a man named Jonathan Lake?"

The oldster stowed away his pistol. "That would be my son's name if you cast it loosely into English. Jeannot Dulac—John-of-the-Lake."

"That's all," Bodette said. He addressed the marshal. "Examine the company's books and you'll find strange and bloody things. You may be able to return much of the loot—or make it up in some way. I'll show you that plunder in the basement."

Johnny Dulac said dryly, "I guess this puts me out on the street, eh?"

"No," Bodette answered, "it shouldn't. The way I see it, you're a valuable man around here now. The law can never get this straightened out without the help of you and—ahem—your gallant father." The old man bowed. Bodette continued, "The marshal, here, I'm sure, will back you up. We did a good turn for him, he'll do a good turn for you. If you handle this right you should come out of it with a first-rate job. You can't fool me—no matter if you do like perfume; I bet my shirt you're a darn good businessman!"

The oldster asked, "Why do you do these things for us?"

"You're more of Calvert's victims. I'm trying to get this all cleared up. Calvert twisted your name around and made up Jonathan Lake. Every way he could, he tried to fix the blame on you. You, sir, thought something was wrong. You felt you were in peril; that's why those locks and that heavy door on your house. I owe you something. You came around last night to save my life. You thought the kettle was about to boil over. You tried to scare me out of town—by using your son's professional reputation."

The marshal said, "Well, son, I do thank you kindly. Mebbe I'll be next sheriff. I'll see that your friends are taken care of."

That night, in his room at the inn, Bodette was unable to go to sleep. He arose from his bed, went to the window, looked out on the great young city. There was something about it, a beating pulse, that was beginning to charm him. Here, under the harvest moon, thousands of rooftops were assembled in one sprawling cluster. He remembered Mr. Settle, the wagoner, and his enthusiasm. Forty-five thousand people—and by the year two thousand, Cincinnati would be the largest city in the entire world!

It wasn't like Blue Rock but, on the otherhand, Blue Rock wasn't like Cincinnati!

He felt himself weakening. He knew that he had heard the call of thronged streets, of busy, bustling crowds. Where else in the world, he asked himself, exists a city with buildings half so tall, a city with a ten-acre landing?

Bodette went to the table. He pulled up a chair, took pen and ink and wrote on a sheet of foolscap:

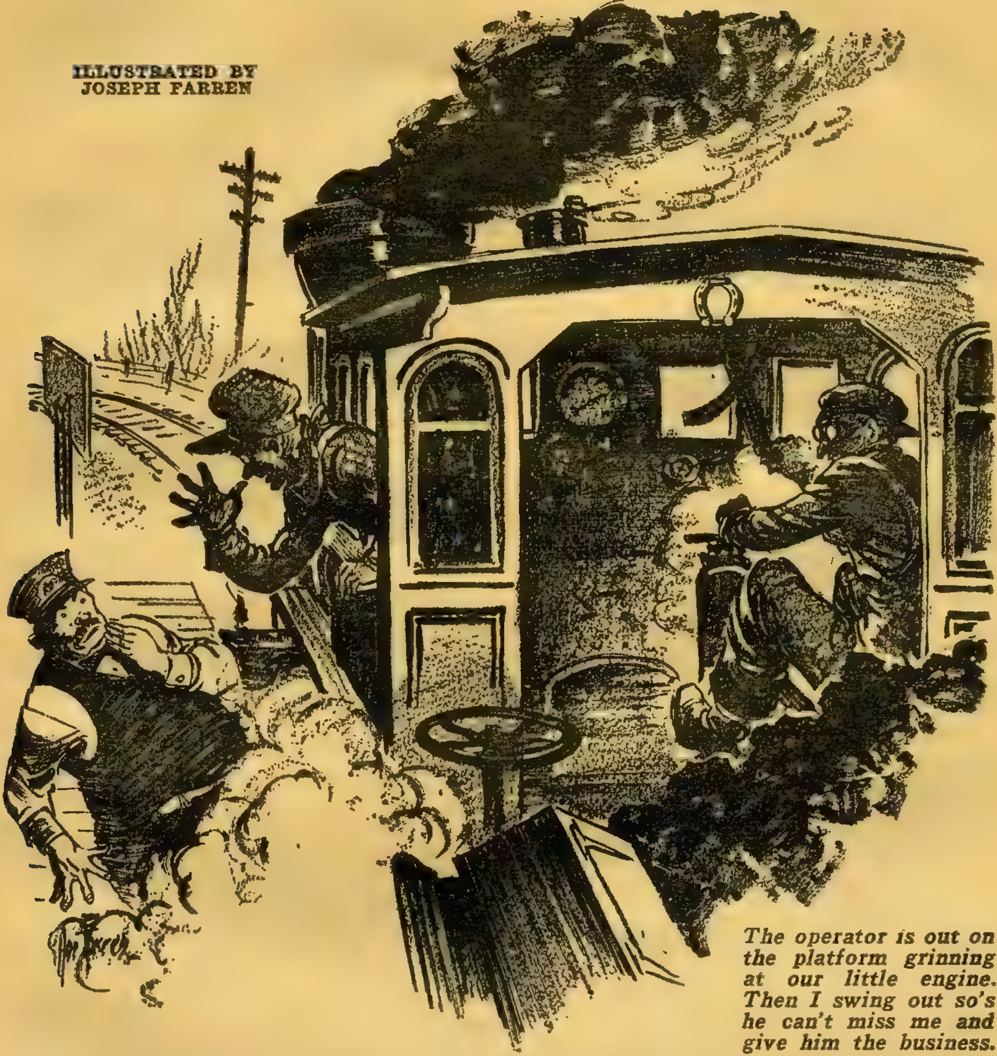
> Dear Father:
>
> I am in Cincinnati. I have decided to enroll here in a college. The Academy at Talbotsville wasn't quite what I had expected. The school here, I am told, was founded by a Tennessean, so we can't go wrong.
>
> Love to Mother.
>
> Your obedient son,
> Kingsley
>
> P. S.
> The trip north through Kentucky was most interesting. It was almost an education in itself.

He sealed the letter, backed it. Somehow he felt better immediately. He felt that now he could sleep.

HIGHBALLING GRANNY

By
KEITH EDGAR

ILLUSTRATED BY
JOSEPH FARREN



The operator is out on the platform grinning at our little engine. Then I swing out so's he can't miss me and give him the business.

IT'S Sunday afternoon, and I'm over at Peggy McIntosh's house stoking my stomach on her mother's very tasty roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Peggy is my intended missus, and I sure hope that she takes after her mother in many ways, and not after her old man. Crazy McIntosh may be the best darn hogger on the whole division, but he's also the meanest, orneriest, most cantankerous old coot on the system—and that, if you know many railroad men, is saying a lot.

The funny part of it, his family thinks that the sun just rises and sets on the horse-faced old stringbean. There he sits, at the head of the table, telling lies about the early days of railroading and inferring that the new generation of railroaders—meaning me—is just a bunch of sissies. Peggy and her mother are just hanging on his words like an oracle or something. It makes me sick. However, things are peaceful enough until Peggy happens to make a remark about us getting married this year.

"Daughter," says Crazy sorrowfully, "ever since you was so high, you been telling your daddy you're gonna marry a railroad man. Surely you ain't gonna change your mind now?"

"But," says Peggy, bewildered, "he works on the railroad, Daddy."

"Hmph," snorts Crazy, eyeing me with disapproval, "that don't make him a railroad man. It takes more than a rule book and a suit of overalls to make a railroader, it does."

"Listen, you old buzzard—" says I, pushing back my chair so's I can get a swing at him. But just then the phone rings, and I sit down again while the sarcastic old mule answers it.

I know by his grunts and snorts that he is being ordered out on a run, and am just thinking that here's one Sunday evening when I won't have to put up with him, when I hear him growl, disgusted like, "Yeah, he's here. Yeah, I'll tell him."

He comes back to the table and grins at me. "Bub, you're called out on a hotshot and ya just got thirty-five minutes to git ready."

"Who's the engineer?" I asks suspiciously.

"Me," grins Crazy, confirming my worst fears.

"My," smiles Peggy, "isn't it nice that you two can get the same run now and then."

Being a born diplomat, I make no comment, but take a hasty leave to go home and change into my overalls and pack my basket.

I hurry down to the yard office and sign out in the brakeman's book and hunt up our caboose. Putting my basket away and digging a few fuses out of the locker, I'm about to mosey up to the roundhouse when Jelly-belly Benson, the conductor, comes wheezing in.

"Hey, Bub!" he hollers. "You might as well git. We ain't goin' nowhere."

"Why ain't we?" I inquires, not believing him.

"We ain't got no injun, that's why!" squawks Jelly-belly, sinking down into his specially reinforced chair and mopping his bald head.

"Why ain't we got no engine?" I know that we're overloaded with war traffic, and for the past year or so we've been running our locomotives right through from Windsor to Buffalo and Niagara Falls, instead of changing them here at St. Thomas. It sure is a wonder how the shop crews have been keeping them rolling without lay-ups. Jelly-belly sees me staring at him in disbelief, and he grudgingly explains.

"The injun bringing our train in has busted a valve or something back at Glencoe. In fact she may not get in at all. We ain't got any hogs in the yard and the super tried to borrow one from the Central but they're in the same fix as we are. So it looks like we got to wait till a westbound gets in, and the nearest one is a drag that ain't reached Simcoe yet. The super and the dispatcher are blowing their tops. It seems that this is a trainload of tanks and field guns that the Army is anxious to get on a convoy that is already made up and only waiting for this shipment. What a mess!" Jelly-belly mops his brow again and sighs.

"Well," says I, "I might as well go up to the depot and see what they are going to do."

I DRIFT up to the station, and there, standing on the platform and waving their arms and shouting at each other like they are ten miles apart, Crazy McIntosh and the super, white-haired Scotty Leyland, are having quite an argument.

Crazy, dressed in clean overalls, his denim cap on backwards and goggles shoved up on his forehead, shakes his horsehide gauntlet under the super's nose and hollers, "She's an injun, ain't she? She'll steam, won't she? And you got to get the hot-shot through, don't ya?"

Scotty scratches his white thatch and sighs, "Look, Mac, the Granny just can't pull fifty-five cars of heavy freight, and you know it. She won't start 'em."

Gosh, Crazy must be nuts, wanting to take the Granny! She is an old teakettle, an antique that is only used to pull the ten-car local up and down the line.

Remember the old pictures you've seen of the wood-burning locomotives with the funnel-shaped stacks? Well, the Granny was built in those days, a long time ago. She's been converted to a coal-burner, of course, and had a superheater added, but in the days when twenty-five cars was a long train, she was built to haul a light passenger train. She's only got two high drivers on each side, and when they count the locomotives they just don't count her.

Crazy McIntosh is still hollering. "Ya can help shove me out of town with the switch engine, can't ya? And when we git to Simcoe we kin change to the hog that's pulling the westbound drag, can't we? Dammit, Scotty, when you and me started on this road the Granny was a good injun, and she still runs, don't she?"

"All right, you old fool!" shouts Scotty. "If Foxy manages to bring her in, you can hook on the Granny and see what you can do."

"I want a clear track," grunts Crazy, "so's I won't have to stop anywhere. I might not get started agin."

"You'll get a clear track," Scotty assures him, "I'll see to that. But Gawd help you if you stall her somewhere on the main line!"

Crazy McIntosh ignores this crack and heads over to the roundhouse. I trail along.

There is the Granny, a real museum piece, with bands of brass around her boiler, and her high slender drivers painted green, and fancy gilt scrollwork on her wooden cab. The boys in the shop are very fond of the old kettle and like to keep her spic and span.

Dirty Dolan, Crazy's fireman, is already up in the cab, laying his fire. Dirty Dolan is a big dumb ox with a bovine face who is just as stupid as he looks, but the one thing he can do is fire an engine to suit Crazy McIntosh. This in itself is quite a feat.

I go back to the depot to see if there is any news of our train coming in as yet.

The operator at Lawrence has just reported our train—No. 82—as having cleared his station. She is only limping along about fifteen miles an hour, but the main thing is that Foxy Giles is keeping her rolling.

The Granny chuffs out of the roundhouse and over to the waiting track. Crazy climbs down out of the cab and starts going over her bearings with his long-spouted oilcan, while a few yardmen and other loafers gather around and offer him advice. One of them suggests that a team of horses might be useful, but Crazy gives him such a blast of down-to-earth profanity that he decides he has work to do elsewhere.

I wander into the dispatcher's office to see how things are coming. Jelly-belly is sitting in the biggest chair, looking right disconsolate. He growls at me, "We're gonna get stuck right on the main line somewheres, that's what."

The dispatcher is at his phone, listening to his headset. He barks out of the corner of his mouth, "They just passed Middlemiss. Good old Foxy! He'll get here yet."

"I doubt it," glooms Jelly-belly.

Scotty Leyland comes into the office looking tired. He says to the dispatcher, "The Army has just been talking to me on long distance. They want this train awful bad."

"They'll get it," says the dispatcher. He turns to Jelly-belly. "I'm ordering you out as an extra. That'll take you off the time card and give you a chance to make up time when you change engines at Simcoe."

"If we get there," snorts Jelly-belly.

The super looks at him awful disgusted-like and walks out. I go back to the engine to tell Crazy that we're running "extra." He just gives me that sarcastic grin of his and gets the white flags out of the locker to stick up at the front of the boiler to denote that we are a special. After he climbs out on the catwalk and shoves them into their sockets, he comes back into the cab and says to me, "Listen, Bub."

"What?" I inquires.

"Listen, Bub, you claim to be a brakeman, huh?"

"I *am* a brakeman."

"Hmph," snorts Crazy, doubtfully. "Well, maybe you are. The point is, you ain't a fireman."

"I can fire," says I.

"You ain't supposed to fire, Bub. In fact, the rule-book says that you can't fire. I'm a great believer in obeying the rule-book," lies Crazy.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Now the point is, this old teapot is gonna need a lot of steam. In fact, she's gonna need more steam than one man can make in that firebox. Now, if you was to fire right-handed, and Dolan was to fire left-handed, we *might* pull this train. The only thing is, you'd be breaking the rules, now, wouldn't you?"

"Where's the spare coal-scoop?" says I.

"Cripes, Bub, wait till we get out of the yards," grunts Crazy, eyeing the steam gauge, which is just creeping up to 200 pounds.

DIRTY DOLAN is skillfully laying his fire light but even, and I begin to realize what we are up against. This engine is so old that it hasn't even got a compressed-air operated firedoor. You pull it open with a chain and close it again when you're through heaving coal. This lets a lot of cold air into the firebox, which never helps any.

Just then we hear Foxy's whistle a few miles out of the yards. Jelly-belly comes puffing over with our clearance, gives Crazy a sort of bewildered look, eyes the engine dubiously, and waddles clumsily back down the track to his caboose.

Our train finally limps in from Windsor, forty minutes late, but Foxy has done a real job to get her in at all. The crippled engine is cut off and trundled over to the roundhouse and we back down and couple on. While I'm connecting the air hose and Crazy tests the brakes, the switch engine puts our caboose on the rear and we are ready to go.

I catch the signal from our rear-end brakeman and give the high-ball, swinging up into the cab.

Crazy McIntosh stands up, swings the Johnson bar back into reverse, releases the air, and pulls back the throttle. Our little engine struggles, but her drivers spin, showering sparks off the rails.

Finding he can't get any more slack into the train, Crazy pulls out his ratty plug, bites off a chew, rolls the quid into a corner of his cheek, spits, throws the Johnson bar forward, yanks the whistle-cord twice and pulls back the throttle.

Granny lurches forward, her exhaust whamming mightily. But, when she has pulled all the slack out of the train, her drivers spin and we stop.

Crazy swears, spits again, rolls his quid into the other cheek, throws the Johnson bar into reverse and gives her the gun. We shoot backwards and manage to pile about five car-lengths of slack into the train before we stop.

He heaves the Johnson bar forward, yanks the whistle-cord again as a signal to the switch engine to start pushing, turns on the sand and pulls back the throttle.

Granny plunges forward like a willing horse heaving against the traces, yanks the slack out of the train again, slows down and, her exhaust thundering *Whamp! Whamp! Whamp! Whamp!*, we start to roll.

With Crazy nursing the throttle and Johnson bar, pouring sand under her drivers, and rapping her stack for all she's got, and the switch engine shoving her darndest on our tail end, we bark slowly out of town, to the intense surprise of everybody concerned.

As we go booming slowly up the slight grade out of town, I stand in the gangway and ruminate. It has just occurred to me that I was the only one, outside of Dirty Dolan, who had no doubts about Crazy's ability to haul this train. Well, I gotta admit, I have a sneaking admiration for his ability. There he is, sitting up in that old wooden cab, quid moving up and down in his leathery cheek, hammering hell out of old Granny, just like it's an everyday job. If only he wasn't so darn hard to get along with! Well, thank heaven, I won't have to live with the old coot when we get married. In fact, the farther I live away from him, the better.

We clear the hump and start on the slight downgrade. The switch engine cuts off, and we are on our own.

I get the spare scoop out of the locker and tell Dirty Dolan to swing over. He changes to the other side of the firebox and I start to heave coal. It ain't easy.

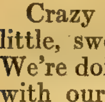
I'm a tall galoot, and the firedoor is very low, just clearing the floor of the cab. But the worst part of it is, Granny, starting to pick up a little speed, starts to jiggle up and down. Have you ever stood on a floor that's jouncing around? Well, try it some time. Add to this the fact that I'm swinging a shovel, trying to time my swing to alternate with Dirty Dolan's, and trying to hit a very small fire-door with my shovel—well, the first two or three swings I miss the door and throw the coal all over the cab.

Crazy McIntosh leers at me and hollers, "Hey, Bub! Don't throw any of them black diamonds out the gangway. We need 'em!"

I just ignore him and concentrate, and it ain't long before I am timing my swing O. K. and Dirty and me are slugging the coal into her gut in perfect rhythm.

Crazy hooks the Johnson bar up a little, swears, and drops it down again. We're doing about twenty miles an hour, with our needle dead on two hundred and ten pounds and Granny bellowing, *whumpa - whumpa - whumpa - whumpa,* like an old lady with whooping-cough. The old kettle is pulling just as hard as she can, but twenty miles an hour is not Crazy McIntosh's idea of going anywhere. Not at all.

He cusses again, expectorates at a whistle post and yanks the cord disgustedly. Granny utters a shrill *Wheeeep! Wheeeep! Wheep - wheep!,* sounding vaguely like a peanut whistle as we jiggle across the highway a few miles east of town.



DIRTY DOLAN and me are slugging coal steadily, but Granny just won't go any faster with that train. Crazy climbs down off his seat and starts fumbling around in the locker. He swears, closes the locker and peers into the box under his seat. Grunting with satisfaction, he digs out a piece of heavy wire, leers at me, and climbs out onto the catwalk alongside the boiler.

I go to the gangway and look out to see what he's doing, and so help me, he's wiring down the safety-valve! He climbs back into the cab and hollers, "Hey, Dolan! I want two hundred and fifty pounds!"

Dolan merely grunts and starts swinging a little faster. I get back to helping him, but filled with misgivings. This engine is an old one, and her boiler is overloaded at 210 pounds. Now, he wants 250. Suppose she won't take it, and blows up? Pleasant, eh?

I'm slugging away, when I hear the exhaust change beat. I look up and see the hogger is hooking the Johnson bar back a little, shortening her valve-stroke. We got 250 pounds on the gauge, and Granny's exhaust quickens its tempo to a rhythmic *chunga - chunga - chunga - chung.* The old girl is pulling so hard that she is swinging from side to side like a hula dancer, as well as bouncing up and down. Our speed is picking up.

The next half-hour is just a period of me and Dolan whanging the coal into her and Crazy hooking up the Johnson bar a notch at a time. His idea is, logically enough, that the faster he can get the old girl rolling, the easier she will haul the train.

So help me, how he does it, I don't know, but by the time we are thundering into Aylmer the Johnson bar is riding in the company notch, and Granny is pitching and rolling and jiggling like a hootchy-cootchy dancer with ants in her pants, her exhaust panting *Ka-chung-Ka-chung-Ka-chung-Ka-chung* in galloping staccato rhythm, as she highballs the hot-shot along at the unbelievable speed of fifty-five miles an hour. The extra forty pounds of steam is what does the trick, and me and Dolan are having the devil's own time keeping it up, what with trying to keep our feet in the agitated cab and alternate our firing strokes so's we don't get in each other's way.

As we boom through the yards at Aylmer, I straighten my back—just to see if I still can—and look over at the hogger.

Crazy, denim cap on backwards, goggles over his eyes, cud moving up and down in his cheek, is leaning out of the cab peering ahead, one arm hooked over the throttle-bar, swaying and bouncing in his seat, pounding hell out of the surprised old kettle.

To my astonishment, as we thunder past the station, Crazy leans out and thumbs his nose at the operator, who had come out onto the platform to wave him on.

Why, the ornery old goat! He's just too mean to live, that's what. Here the operator is just being nice and giving him a hand for the job he's doing, and he's gotta make nasty gestures. I go back to my coal scoop in disgust.

I hear our whistle *wheep-wheeping* for Tilsonburg, and jump to the gangway to get a look at the order-board, the station being on my side of the cab. It is clear and I holler, "On the green!"

Crazy calls me over to his side.

"Listen, Bub. When we go through the station, you lean out and thumb yer nose at the operator, see?"

"What? Like hell I will! I ain't nuts, even if you are!"

Crazy leers at me. "Listen, Bub, if you thumb yer nose at the operator, he'll be so mad maybe he won't notice the safety-valve is wired down, and if he don't notice it, we won't get fired, see?"

"Huh?" This is a new angle on me. But I ain't got time to think about it because just then we hit the trestle and I dive over to the other side of the cab and lean out the gangway as we go jerking and swaying past the station.

The operator, a nice guy named Itchybritches Donahue, is out on the platform grinning at our tiny little engine and kind of startled at the speed we are doing. Then I swing out so's he can't miss me and give him the business.

Donahue jerks his eyes off Granny and focuses them on me and his grin is wiped off to be replaced by a look of surprised anger. By that time we are past, so I wave to him apologetically and swing back into the cab, feeling kind of mean, but glad he didn't notice the safety-valve. Crazy is grinning at me, but I ignore him and go back to slugging coal.

Then I get mad when I realize what he has let me in for. Courtland and Delhi, the next two stations, are on my side too. I sure am going to make a lot of friends on this trip. So I think, nuts, I'll let them see the valve is wired, and let the old coot be fired. But then, I'll probably be fired too, for not objecting, and also my chances of marrying Peggy will be ruined if I let the old mule get into trouble. Sometimes life is hard.

SO I make two more lifelong enemies at Courtland and Delhi, and the next time I pause in my coal-heaving to get my wind, I see we are bowling down the grade from Nixon into Simcoe.

Crazy climbs out on the catwalk to take the wire off the safety-valve, and me and Dolan take a well-earned rest as we coast down into the yards. We have done an almighty good job to get the train this far with Granny, and we all breathe easier when we see the westbound with her big hog waiting in the siding, although I wonder why she ain't turned around ready to couple onto our train.

Crazy McIntosh spots Granny under the water tank and Dolan climbs up on the tender to attend to the spout, while me and Crazy swing down out of the engine onto the station platform.

The operator comes running up looking heartbroken, and I wonder if someone has reported us over that valve business.

"Cripes, Mister McIntosh," he pants, waving an order around at us, "I guess you're outa luck this trip! This engine ain't got enough coal to take your train over and the super says for you to keep right on going with the Granny! He says he'll try to have one at Cayuga if you can get that far, and this engine will push you up the hill out of town. It's the best we can do!"

Crazy McIntosh takes off his goggles and wipes them with a piece of cotton waste, expectorates, and hollers, "Well? Where's me goddam clearance?"

The operator runs back into his office and Crazy takes a quick look at Granny's bearings while Dirty Dolan finishes filling our tank. In the meantime, the big freight hog has moved down and coupled onto our rear end. By the time the operator runs back with our clearance, we are ready to go.

Crazy jerks the whistle-cord twice and throws off the air. But he don't touch the throttle or Johnson bar. He just waits, giving me that sly grin of his.

I hear the answering *whoop-whoop* of the other engine, and all at once we start to move. Crazy, the old fox, is letting the other guy shove us out of town all by himself. Of course, the big mogul pushes us up that hill like nothing at all, while I take my time getting our head of steam back. I hear a clatter and turn my head in time to see Dirty Dolan roll down into the cab from the tender. The dumb ox has lost his balance and come down head first.

The trouble is, it isn't his head that's hurt. He has sprained his wrist, and when Crazy sees it, he utters a howl of rage and disappointment. Not a word of sympathy. With poor Dolan standing there stupidly holding his wrist and looking surprised, Crazy turns the air purple with lamentations about *his* fate.

"Dammit!" hollers Crazy. "Now we gotta roll her back down the hill into Simcoe and wait for an injun! This *would* happen to me—and just when they gotta have this train in a hurry! Gonna spoil my record, it is!"

"Listen, you heartless old buzzard!" I hollers at him. "Cut out yer beefing and drive the hog. I can keep her hot."

"You?" Crazy shoves his goggles up and stares at me. "You? Why listen, Bub, this a man's job, a railroad man's job. I need a fireman, not a—a—"

I pick up the coal scoop and debate whether to whang him on the head and do the world a favor, or not, while he gloomily spits out his cud and bites off a fresh chew.

"You simple-minded bonehead!" I shout, real sore by now. "I'll bet you twenty bucks I can give you all the steam you can use!"

Crazy shakes his head sorrowfully, looks back to make sure we are around the curve and out of sight of the station, picks up his piece of wire again and goes out to make his little adjustment to the safety-valve.

He climbs back in, slumps down, looks at me thoughtfully, looks at the steam-gauge disconsolately, pulls down his goggles, and eases open the throttle.

The big freight hog is just pushing us over the crest of the hill, and Granny gradually takes over the train. I don't know who that hogger was that was pushing us, but he stays back there until he has us bowling right along before he cuts off, leaving us with a pretty fair start.

Well, Dirty Dolan settles sadly up on his seat and I settle down to slugging coal, while Crazy McIntosh don't settle down at all. He keeps looking at the steam-gauge and looking at me and shaking his head, sorrowful like, while he tentatively hooks the throttle back a little.

To tell the truth, I'm having the devil of a time trying to get our 250 pounds of steam back. It's not a one-man job.

Here I am, heaving my heart out, slapping the coal into that hungry firebox and wondering why I started on the railroad in the first place, and every time the needle moves up a little, Crazy hooks the throttle back a little, bringing her down again.

I don't say a word—I'm too busy. The sweat is running down my back and down my forehead into my eyes, and my arms are working like pistons as I swing the scoop, back and forth, back and forth, till time ceases to exist and the only reality is the needle on the gauge, and it won't move.

Dirty Dolan climbs down off his seat and looks at the fire. Then he picks up the long fire-rake with one hand, shoves it into the firebox and stirs up the fire. The needle moves up ten pounds. I get the idea, and from then on it's slug coal and rake, slug coal and rake, while the pressure steadily moves up and Crazy gradually hooks back the Johnson bar.

A WHILE later, after several hours have passed—at least, it *seemed* like several hours—I notice that Granny is now jouncing and jiggling and swaying with the vim and vigor that she displayed before, and I cast an eye at the gauge. It's just over 250. The Johnson bar is back in the company notch again, and Crazy McIntosh is leaning out the cab window, bouncing up and down, his quid moving around in his leathery cheek, arm hooked over the throttle, which is at the back of the quadrant, and I realize that I am steaming her O. K.

With a sigh of satisfaction, I straighten my back with a tremendous effort and stagger to the gangway to get a breather.

I'm gulping in the fresh air when there is a bellow of anguish from Crazy. I jump and look around to see him gazing dejectedly at the steam-gauge.

I curse and jump back to my shovel, wondering how the damn thing could drop so fast.

Slug coal and rake, slug coal and rake, slug coal and rake, while Granny lurches and sways and rocks and bellows, *chung-a-chung-a-chung-a-chung,* her shrill whistle sounding like the screeching of a senile old crone. The blood is roaring in my ears and the sweat is blinding me and my back feels like it has finally broken altogether. But I keep her hot, and Crazy McIntosh pounds her stack, and the hot-shot gets fifty-five miles nearer that convoy as each hour passes.

Crazy gets down off his seat, crosses the cab and looks out ahead. He swears something awful, so I look too. We are just hitting the top of the grade down into Cayuga, and—there is no engine waiting for us.

I don't like it either. Cayuga is at the bottom of a hill, like Simcoe, only more so. A long curving grade down, a trestle at the bottom over a river, and a steep grade up out of town again. That means we'll have to cut the train in two and take her up half at a time, a very tedious procedure which wastes a lot of time.

As we hit the down-grade, Dolan hollers, "She's on the green!" which means we got a clearance right on through.

Crazy grunts, and hollers at me, "Hey, Bub! Climb up on the seat and hang on till we cross the trestle!"

I guess I look kind of startled when I realize he is going to high-ball right down that hill. He isn't called Crazy for nothing!

Anyway, he leers at me and says, "Of course, if you think it's too dangerous, then I'll give her the air. Huh, Bub?"

"I can ride anything you can drive, you dingbat," I tell him, and climb up onto the seat beside Dolan.

By this time the whole train is riding down the grade, building up a tremendous momentum. Our light little engine begins to rock wildly.

I look over at Crazy. He hasn't touched either the throttle or the air, and apparently has no intention of doing so. He's just leaning out of the cab, intently watching the track ahead through his goggles and chewing his cud as if we're jogging along at ten miles an hour.

Granny starts to pitch from side to side, swinging and swaying as the train tries to push her and Crazy tries to prevent the train from piling up behind her and taking out all our slack. He's got to keep *pulling* the train or we lose all the advantage he is risking so much to gain.

Several times I think we are off the rails. Granny lurches and rolls and screams against the flanges, but stays on the track. By the time we hit the bottom and catapult onto the trestle, she is rolling and rocking so hard that the only thing that holds her on the rails is the weight of the train behind. The longest five seconds I've ever lived in my life is the time it takes to shoot across that bridge, with every lurch apparently her last.

Well, we make it, and rocket up the hill like it isn't even there. I swallow my heart again, and climb weakly down to pick up my shovel.

Crazy leers at me, looks at the steam-gauge, shakes his head and bites off a fresh chew.

We thunder over the crest of the hill with plenty of speed left and the Johnson bar only dropped down a few notches. It would take a pretty good man to do that with one of the big hogs. Only a screwball—or a genius—could possibly do it with Granny.

Slug coal and rake, slug coal and rake, slug coal and rake. At Nelles Corners, Crazy McIntosh bewilders and insults the operator by thumbing his nose derisively as we cannonball through. He don't notice that the safety-valve is wired down either.

PAST Nelles Corners, I hear the whistle *wheep-wheep* for no apparent reason, and stagger to the gangway to see what's up. Our line runs parallel to the New York Central at this point, and so help me, we are overhauling one of their hot-shots pulled by a big Hudson-type, stoker-fired hog.

The hogger and fireman stand in their gangway and gaze at us with open mouths, while Crazy yanks the whistle-cord again and thumbs his nose at them joyfully. I don't blame them for looking flabbergasted. It must have been quite a sight to see our tiny engine highballing along with a sizeable train and passing them.

I jump back to my coal-scoop with a little more vim, and soon lose all track of time again. I'm finding it a little harder to keep my feet now, and once in a while I miss my swing and toss the coal all over the cab. Every time I do this, Crazy utters a sarcastic remark, telling me to save enough coal to take us in. I'm so exhausted I don't even bother to swear back at him.

By the time we pass Welland Junction—fortunately the agent has the switches set for us—I can hardly stand up, and the more fatigued I get, the more I hate Crazy's guts. He just sits there and hollers for steam and pounds old Granny's tail as hard as he can, while I slug my heart out to keep her hot and hope I have enough strength left when we get in to wallop him just once.

The last few miles into Niagara Falls are straight and level, and we pull it fairly easily, although I ain't got much strength left. Crazy climbs out and takes his wire off the safety-valve, as there are too many section men and switchmen around this district.

Finally, Granny is highballing our trainload of war freight into the yards at the Falls. When we rattle onto the main line leading to the international bridge and see the big mogul waiting to whip our train on to the coast, I throw down my shovel, painfully straighten my back, wipe the sweat out of my eyes, and gasp, "Now, you half-witted old goat, you owe me twenty bucks."

Crazy McIntosh shoves up his goggles, eases off the throttle, and grins at me. "Bub, one of these here days yer gonna be a real railroad man."

Well, he ain't such a bad guy after all, I guess, and I almost tell him to forget about the twenty bucks, but it's a good thing I don't.

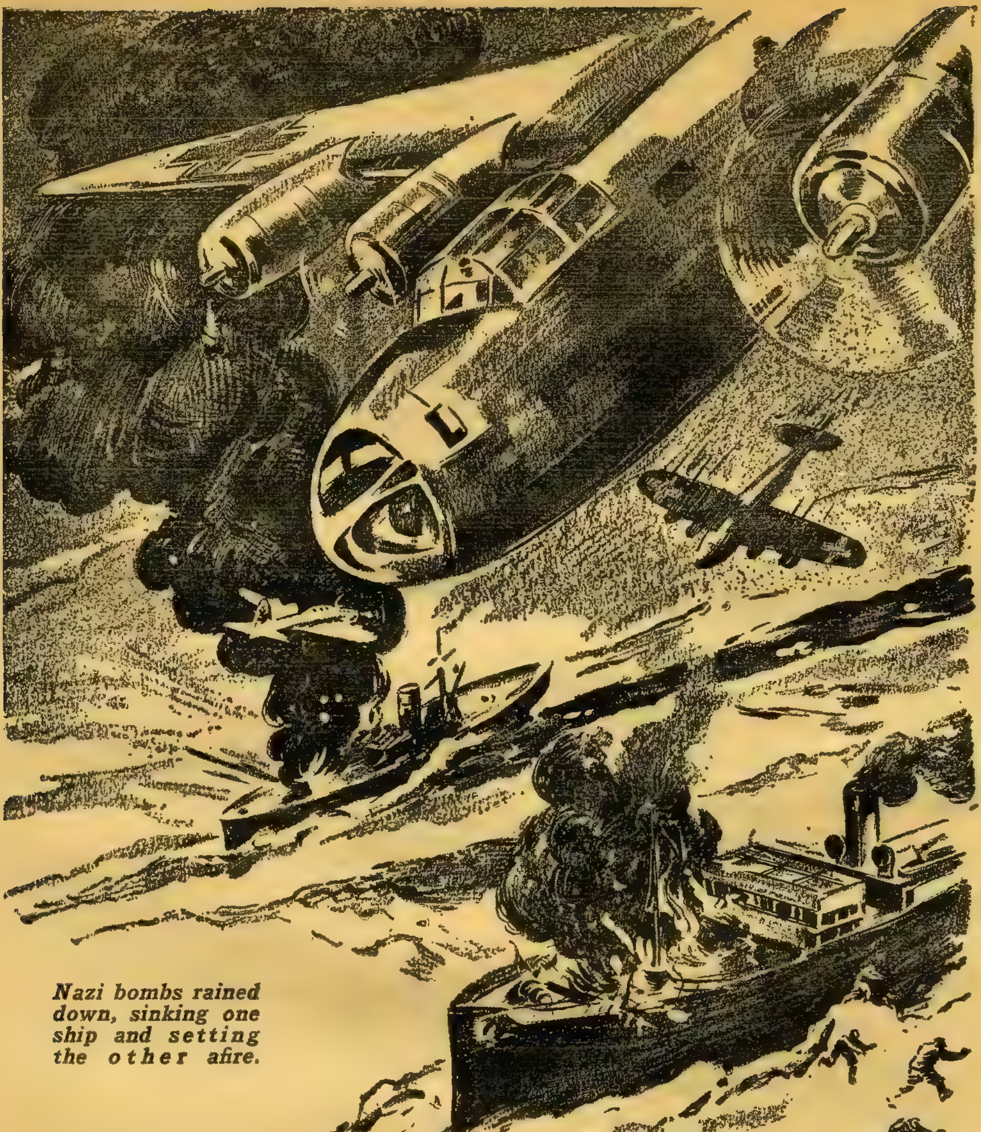
We're ordered back deadhead to St. Thomas and it is quite a treat to ride as a passenger. When we get in, we find we're wanted up in the super's office.

Of course, Crazy McIntosh and Dirty Dolan go in first, and old Scotty Leyland pounds them on the back and roars about how proud he is of them, and how he is going to write to the president of the road, et cetera. Well, they come out looking pretty sheepish and then it is my turn, and believe me I deserve all the pats on the back I'm going to get.

I go right up to his desk and say, "Good day, Mister Leyland. That was some run we made, eh?"

He jumps up, shakes a finger under my nose and hollers, "Say listen! Where the hell did you get the idea that it's smart to thumb your nose at our operators? Wise guy, huh? Just for that you can take a week off without pay!"

Oh, well, I needed a holiday, anyway.



Nazi bombs rained down, sinking one ship and setting the other afire.

A Fact Story

ARCTIC ATTACK

By KURT SINGER

ILLUSTRATED BY SAMUEL G. CAHAN

ON THE very day that Italy surrendered and the Russian steamroller pushed ahead on the Eastern front, the Nazi radio boasted a "great victory"—the occupation of the tiny Norwegian outpost of Spitzbergen, only five hundred miles from the North Pole, where the Norwegians maintained a meteorological station (important for the weather reports of the R.A.F.) on the last bit of soil still under the free flag of Norway. Because of that "great victory" the full story of an almost incredible tale of arctic adventure now can be told.

Spitzbergen, or Svalbard as the Norwegians call it, was not occupied when the Nazis moved into the rest of Norway. Possibly this was because, in addition to the Norwegian miners who worked the rich coal deposits up there, there were also Russians who operated coal mines in the region for the Soviet Union and at that time Germany had a non-aggression pact with the USSR. But after Hitler marched into Russia in 1941 it seemed probable that he would seize Spitzbergen, so the Norwegian and Russian population was evacuated and, as far as the outside world knew, Svalbard lay deserted.

But the war had reached even this barren, mountainous land in the Arctic. Following the Allied landing in September 1941, when the meteorological stations, the coal mines and all other installations which might be of value to the Nazis were destroyed and the population evacuated, a German expeditionary force arrived in Spitzbergen and hoisted the swastika at the end of the same month.

At that time it was not known whether the Nazis merely inspected the damage and went back again or whether they had left troops to spend the winter on the island. Later it was discovered that not only had the Germans left a garrison but that they had constructed an air base.

IN MAY 1942, a small Norwegian force consisting of eighty-two men on an icebreaker and a fishing vessel was sent to Spitzbergen to resume Norwegian sovereignity over the archipelago and continue the meteorological work which had been carried out over a period of years and was of greatest interest to the Allied air forces.

The expedition arrived at Cape Linn at the mouth of Ice Fjord on May 13, and saw no signs of Germans or German activity. Ice Fjord was icebound and it was useless to attempt to force a way to Longyear City, the center of the Norwegian coal operations. It was therefore decided to go through Groenn Fjord to Barentsburg, the Russian mining town which lies on a secondary fjord close to the entry of Ice Fjord.

On the morning of May 14—this was during the period of the midnight sun so all the work went on day and night—the expedition was discovered by a German reconnaissance plane. Since they were only two miles from Barentsburg, the work of the icebreaker continued while a patrol was put on shore to reconnoiter.

At ten o'clock in the evening only one mile of ice remained to be broken through. Suddenly, above the noise of the crushing floes, the men heard the drone of an airplane engine. Immediately afterwards four four-motor bombing planes, Focke-Wulf Condors, came straight toward the ships. There was a violent battle. The Norwegians shot with all they had. Both anti-aircraft and machine guns succeeded in scoring some hits on the planes, but not enough to put them out of action. Gradually the battle became more unequal as German bombs began to rain down on the two easily visible targets on the ice. In the course of a quarter of an hour one of the ships was sunk and the other set on fire. Twelve Norwegians were killed and several were injured. All the men could do was to jump overboard onto the ice or into the water. They lay down on the ice and pretended to be dead, since there was no cover to be found anywhere. All of them were wet through and the temperature was between forty and fifty degrees below freezing.

The Nazis kept up their strafing for more than an hour, with bombs, cannonfire and machine-gun bullets, and two more men were fatally wounded. Finally the planes ran short of fuel and ammunition and turned off in a southerly direction.

The Norwegians grouped themselves together on the ice and carried the wounded men into Barentsburg, where they made their way to houses formerly occupied by the Russians. The first task was to give first aid to the wounded. Fortunately they found some bandages in the Russian hospital. The next problem was food and clothing. Most of them were insufficiently clad and their boots were in particularly bad condition. They had not been able to save any food from their ships; all they had been able to salvage was ten or twelve pairs with light ammunition, fifteen pairs of skis, two knapsacks, a map and compass, and a broken signal lamp.

Parties were now sent around the Russian mining town, which had been abandoned since the previous fall, and fortunately it was not long before they found clothes and food in large quantities: tea and coffee, margarine and crackers, dry vegetables. The only thing that was lacking was meat. Then one of the men remembered that the Russians used to keep pigs and that probably the pigs had been shot when the place was evacuated the fall before. Since then the temperature had been below freezing the whole time, so the flesh would probably be in good condition still. Sure enough, after a search the pigsties were discovered, the snow was scraped away, and a number of carcasses came to light. A good deal of the meat was fit to eat.

The Germans, however, had no intention of leaving matters as they were. The next day, bombers flew over Barentsburg and from the tracks on the snow the Nazi airmen could tell that there were still some men left alive and that they had made their way to the Russian houses. They therefore attacked Barentsburg with cannon and machine-gun fire, coming back four times. The wounded had to be carried down to a cellar. Fortunately, no one was hit. The situation, however, had become untenable and it was decided to send a number of the men to safe refuges elsewhere on the island. Nineteen men set out on the journey.

THE German planes came back the next day and the same thing was repeated every day until May 25. These planes were two-engined bombers which presumably had a landing place on the island. The Norwegians therefore sent out reconnaissance patrols toward Longyear City, forty miles away, where it was thought the Nazis had their base.

On May 25 the Nazis dropped their first bombs, and the large wooden buildings caught fire. The Norwegians had to seek shelter in a sand and cement warehouse on the water's edge, taking the wounded men with them.

Everything now looked hopeless, but the next day hope revived. A Catalina, belonging to the British Coastal Command, appeared over Barentsburg on a long-range sortie and the Norwegians succeeded in sending an SOS message to it with their signaling lamp, which they had managed to repair and fit with Russian batteries.

The same day twelve more men were sent to safe refuges. The march across the island was dangerous and exhausting. One man fell into a crevice and was killed. Every day until May 31 the Nazis continued their bombing of Barentsburg with the object of wearing down the Norwegians still there, but they managed to stick it out in their warehouse. On May 29 they managed to establish their first regular connection with the outside world: A Catalina plane dropped a note asking what they needed, and by means of signals the Norwegians were able to send back full information.

After May 31, the Germans suddenly stopped their full-scale attacks and contented themselves with a little reconnaissance and machine-gun fire. Then one day in the beginning of June, the Norwegians were able to shake hands with a British airman who arrived on board a Catalina plane which landed on the fjord, where the ice had melted sufficiently. The plane took the seven badly wounded men back and the others were told that help would arrive soon.

On July 2 a British naval force arrived at Barentsburg, where they were warmly welcomed by a crowd of ragged and hairy-faced men.

A Norwegian force was landed and the men on the island at last saw what they had yearned for so long: weapons and equipment. Meanwhile, reconnaisance patrols which had been sent out to locate the German garrison had been achieving remarkable success. They found the Nazis, as they had expected, at Longyear City, but since the Norwegian patrols had next to no weapons, it was impossible for them to attack. However, they made their presence felt by hovering around the German encampment and leaving so many ski tracks in the snow that the enemy believed their numbers to be much greater than they actually were. They so terrorized the Germans that the garrison kept within doors and contented itself with sending out planes. The Norwegians kept up these tactics until the enemy's air activity gradually petered out.

WHEN they were finally reinforced and rearmed, the Norwegian force made a full-dress descent on Longyear City on July 14. There they discovered that their patrols had achieved an unexpected triumph. The Nazi garrison, no longer able to stand the strain, had evacuated and their quarters were deserted. Since then Norwegian forces have remained on Spitzbergen. These forces have never been large but they have been men who knew that they were defending Norwegian soil and who have been accustomed to the hard life up close to the North Pole.

The Nazi commando raid on Spitzbergen in September 1943 was successful. Norwegians were taken prisoner and brought to Quisling Norway—but three days later the combined British-Norwegian and American navies occupied Spitzbergen again.

PICTURE OF A GRADE-A CITIZEN!

¶ Meet the kind of man who believes that any other nation and race is fit only for slavery!

¶ Meet the kind of man who believes only the rule of blood and destruction; who believes that decency, honesty and kindness are "decadent," weak, and foolish.

¶ Meet the kind of man who never asks, but *takes*—at gun-point!

¶ *Sure,* we'll meet him—with bombs, with bullets, with tanks, fighting planes, and ships!

Invest in the Best Christmas Gift

BUY WAR BONDS TODAY!

(Continued from page 8)

was generally used as early as 1833. (The time of our story, roughly, is the early 1840's, when the bulk of the Seminole removals took place.

P. 67—"Post of Command". It seems pretty brass-hatty to complain about this one—though I suppose the officer is right, in the sense that no Army man would get that far outside the vernacular.

P. 69—"Efficiency". Here again, it is the question of the "key of words" employed. The same goes for the use of "pragmatist". While it is true that modern philosophers (such as James and Dewey) did bring the word into popular usage, it was not unknown in those days . . . as a word meaning to solve a knotty problem by cutting through the knots. E. g., the "Pragmatic Sanction", as a royal edict solving some diplomatic impasse, royal marriage, etc. . . .

P. 74—"Pet-cock". I do know there is such a word used in connection with valves in the hull of a vessel to drain out bilge, etc., while in dry-dock. Of course, this is one that you're always sure to be called on, and I should have checked the term more carefully.

P. 72—"Manifest destiny". We have history on our side here (this *is* a 19th, not a 20th, century term). It first appeared in print in 1845, in the "Democratic Review," in an article which began, "Our manifest destiny is to overspread the continent." Apparently, it was used as a catch-phrase in the Polk campaign of 1844. . . . In "Red Justice," the person using the term says "you'll be hearing this phrase often from now on." Perhaps we crowded history by using it a year or two ahead of its actual coinage, but isn't that dramatic license?

P. 78—"Torpedo". Demonstrated by Robert Fulton in 1805. Of course, it wasn't a practical weapon, but military men *must* have known of it in 1840.

We like the kind of chiding Officer X doles out—it's the sort of thing that keeps us on our toes—so don't be diffident about calling us when you think you've spotted a boner in the text.

MOVIE NOTES:—Thompson Burtis' "The War of the Wildcats" which appeared in last month's *Adventure* has been filmed by Republic Pictures and will be released about the time this issue appears. John Wayne, Martha Scott, Albert Dekker and Marjorie Rambeau are among the players. The picture has been titled "In Old Oklahoma" and advance notices dub it a "lavish production."

And Leslie T. White's "5000 Trojan Horses" which ran serially in these pages back in 1942—June and July of that year —has been released by Warner Brothers as "Northern Pursuit." Raoul Walsh did the directing job and Errol Flynn, Julie Bishop and Monte Blue, among others, are in the cast.

COL. F. B. EDWARDS, USA (ret.) of McAlester, Okla. wants to track down "a short slogan or motto—*The Equalizer*—that appeared in your magazine some years ago. It was the story of the old revolver equalizing the weak and strong."

Col. Edwards has an old pistol he's planning to present to his son, a lieutenant in the Navy, and wants a copy of the motto to engrave on it.

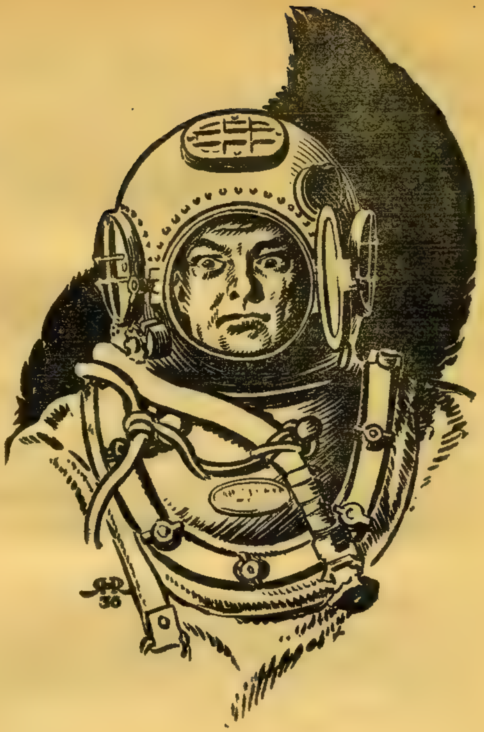
We couldn't locate the item in back issues of the magazine and wrote Donegan Wiggins asking if he could help. Our *AA* gun expert, answers—

> I seem to recall that some years past, a short poem of that nature *was* published in our magazine—I cannot recall just how it went—but———
>
> Many years since, in the catalogue of old weapons published by Bannerman, a verse appeared something like the following, and was stated to have been engraved on some old pistol—
>
> *Fear not thy foeman's greater height,*
> *Nor dread his greater size.*
> *I am the arm of truth and right,*
> *Yea, I will equalize.*
>
> It's been years since I read that, but as I recall it, that's the way it went. You might give Bannerman a ring, and they *might* be able to give you the exact words, from their files of old catalogues, of which my own consists of one lonely copy.

We called Bannerman and no one there seemed to know what we were talking about. Can any reader verify Wiggins' quotation or correct it if he hasn't recalled the lines quite accurately? Or give Col. Edwards another version of what he's hunting?—K.S.W.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere



FATHOMS down.

Query:—What do you have to know to be a diver? What does an average set of diving equipment cost? I read of your experiences on Gorda Key. What size of ship is best for that sort of operation? What would such a ship cost? How do you find out where old ship hulks lie? By rumor only?

—James Robert Davis,
U. S. S. New Mexico, Div. III,
c/o Fleet P. O.,
San Francisco, Calif.

Reply by Lieut. Harry E. Rieseberg:—1. Any intelligent person may learn diving; however, the main requisite is a good heart. Most commercial divers have picked up the profession by having worked in various capacities about docks, shipyards and other marine activities.

2. An average set of diving equipment today cannot be purchased at any price new; however, there may be obtained a second-hand set—if one can find it. Therefore no price can be given on the gear. You might write to Andrew Morse Company, Boston, Mass., who deal in practically all underwater equipment.

3. The size of the salvage ship one needs for commercial salvage work depends on his equipment, pocketbook and the job to be tackled. You mention having read a story of mine about Gorda Cay; if you have in mind such an undertaking, which was not in the commercial salvage field but for treasure recovery, then you will really run into costs, as treasure expeditions such as this range in the neighborhood of approximately $60,000. However, most any sloop, small schooner or even a motor boat may be used in suited diving, but for that with robots and mechanical work it necessitates large craft.

4. A sailing craft is the best for salvage operations of any kind, due to its small cost of operation.

5. In my case I have spent considerable time and effort to locate the resting places of the old ships sunk; I never waste time in depending on rumors. My recent volume, "I Dive for Treasure," gives some five-hundred-odd authentic treasure ship locations which may interest you; these have been acquired by extensive research from authenticated records, logs, etc.

OF the homelife of the hummingbird.

Query:—I am well aware of the fact that the ordinary layman is not a competent observer and hence take the liberty to write you for a check-up on our observations of the nesting habits of the humming bird.

Near the tip of a very slender branch of a plum-tree and only six feet from the ground (and eighteen feet from our front room window) we discovered a hummingbird on a well constructed nest.

So I warned all members of my household to keep away from the nest but we had a wonderful opportunity to note what was going on with the aid of binoculars from our front room.

The young ones were hatched, two of them, but they seemed to get very little attention. About three times per day one bird (seemed to be the female) paid them a visit and inserted her long bill right down the throat of the youngsters.

Then after a week or so we had a heavy rainstorm and the slender branch sagged almost to the vertical, threaten-

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GAS SAVING TEST

Will you permit us to send you at our risk the Vacu-matic, a device which auto owners everywhere are praising? Install it on your car. Test it at our risk. Unless it trims dollars off your gas bills by saving up to 30% on gasoline consumption, gives more power, quicker pickup and faster acceleration, the test will cost you nothing.

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Vacu-matic is *entirely different!* It operates on the supercharge principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely automatic and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing as required. Saves up to 30% on gas costs, with better motor performance.

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WAR-WORKER'S ITCH?

Here's What to Do:

Even if your skin is fiery red and scaly—if the externally-caused burning and itching seem unbearable—DON'T SCRATCH! Just apply Sayman Salve to the rough, red, burning, itching skin. Containing not just one, but THREE well-known medicinal ingredients, this grand medicated ointment acts to provide palliative relief from the tormenting itch, helps relieve fiery redness and soften scaly skin. All druggists. Only 25c.

SAYMAN SALVE

ening to dump out the youngsters. So I went over to the nest and tied up the branch with a very fine piece of trout line. The old bird came back in the evening to feed the young and she did not seem to mind the altered position of the branch.

So we watched them day after day (sorry I can not give you the exact number of days) and finally one evening we noted the two youngsters standing on the edge of the nest flexing their little wings. They were all alone and we did not see the female but we realized that it was about time for them to "take off," as my son said. Next morning they were gone (8 A. M.).

We examined the nest and found that one side, the one nearest the tip of the branch, had been pulled out to the level of the bottom of the nest and we presume the motherbird must have got into the nest and crowded the youngsters out. At first we surmised there had been a tragedy, but since we find no trace of feathers we hope all went off well as I have described.

Kindly give me your opinion.

—William Douglas,
Courtenay, B. C., Canada.

Reply by Davis Quinn:—According to your report, there appears to be no doubt but that all the young birds simply went out into the world in a perfectly normal manner and in good health and strength and most of them may be expected to survive to a good old age (speaking comparatively for the species, that is). The hummingbird is such a remarkable aerial performer that it has few natural enemies. It is almost never caught by predatory birds or mammals, although it has been taken by a fish when hovering low over a lake.

Your observations appear to have been rather accurate. The female does do all the nest-building and incubating and feeding, as a rule. The time for rearing the young—from date of hatching, that is, until they leave the nest—has been reported by various observers as six to twenty-eight days. You will notice that there is quite a discrepancy between dates, the reason being, no doubt, that in warm climates food is more abundant and the young grow faster. In your climate the average time would probably be between 3 and 4 weeks.

The young will usually leave the nest of their own accord, but the mother has been known to drag them off the nest when grown, with her long bill.

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

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Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past, please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—Earl B. Powell, care of *Adventure*.

Baseball—Frederick Lieb, care of *Adventure*.

Basketball—Stanley Carhart, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. Carhart, c/o *Adventure*.

Boxing—Col. John V. Grombach, 1619 Mass. Ave. N.W., Wash., D. C.

Camping—Paul M. Fink, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing: *Paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—Edgar S. Perkins, 1325 So. Main St., Princeton, Ill.

Coins and Medals—William L. Clark, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

Dogs—Freeman Lloyd, care of *Adventure*.

Fencing—Col. John V. Grombach, 1619 Mass. Ave. N.W., Wash., D. C.

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Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Expositionu Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Aviation: *Airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders* — MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, 1091 Springdale Rd., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

Marine Architecture: *Ship modeling*—Chas. H. Hall, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—Victor Shaw, care of *Adventure.*

Ornithology: *Birds; their habits and distribution*—Davis Quinn, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places; general information*—Paul L. Anderson, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—Donald McNicol, care of *Adventure.*

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. Newman, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—Hapsburg Liebe, care of *Adventure.*

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Wildcrafting and Trapping — Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—Francis H. Bent, care of *Adventure.*

The Merchant Marine—Gordon MacAllister, care of *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—Alec Cavadas, King Edward High School, Vancouver, B. C.

State Police—Francis H. Bent, care of *Adventure.*

U. S. Marine Corps—Major F. W. Hopkins, care of *Adventure.*

U. S. Navy—Lieutenant Durand Kiefer, care of *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—Buck Conner, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★New Guinea—L. P. B. Armit, care of *Adventure.*

★New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa—Tom L. Mills, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—Alan Foley, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—William McCreadie, "Ingle Nook," 39 Cornelia St., Wiley Park, N. S. W., Australia.

Hawaii—John Snell, Deputy Administrator, Defense Savings Staff, 1055 Bishop St., Honolulu, T. H.

Madagascar—Ralph Linton, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—Capt. H. W. Eades, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya*—Gordon MacCreagh, 2231 W. Harbor Drive, St. Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—Captain Beverly-Giddings, care of *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—Major S. L. Glenister, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—Peter Franklin, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

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Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 952 No. Hudson Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to Lost Trails will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Any oldtimer who can recall the name or the name and address of the pharmacist's mate who ran the sick bay at Main Barracks, Yerba Buena Naval Station, (Goat Island or Boat Hill to the gobs), during the Fall of 1918 will do a great favor by informing Bill Gianella, 1042 59th St., Oakland, 8, Calif.

Any information as to the whereabouts of Rochus Cofer of Smithfield, Va., last heard of eleven years ago, will be appreciated by his brother, John M. Cofer, 124 N. North Carolina Ave., Atlantic City, N. J.

William J. Smith, age 51 years, light blue eyes, dark brown hair, height 6 ft., last heard of in State of Washington. He was born in Montesano, Wash., and spent school days in Grants Pass, Ore. Anyone knowing his whereabouts please communicate with his brother-in-law, C. E. Baker, 968 Neilson St., Berkeley 6, Calif.

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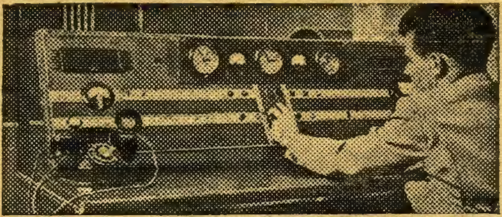

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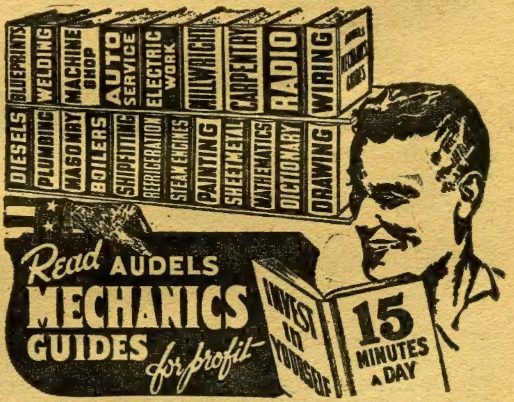

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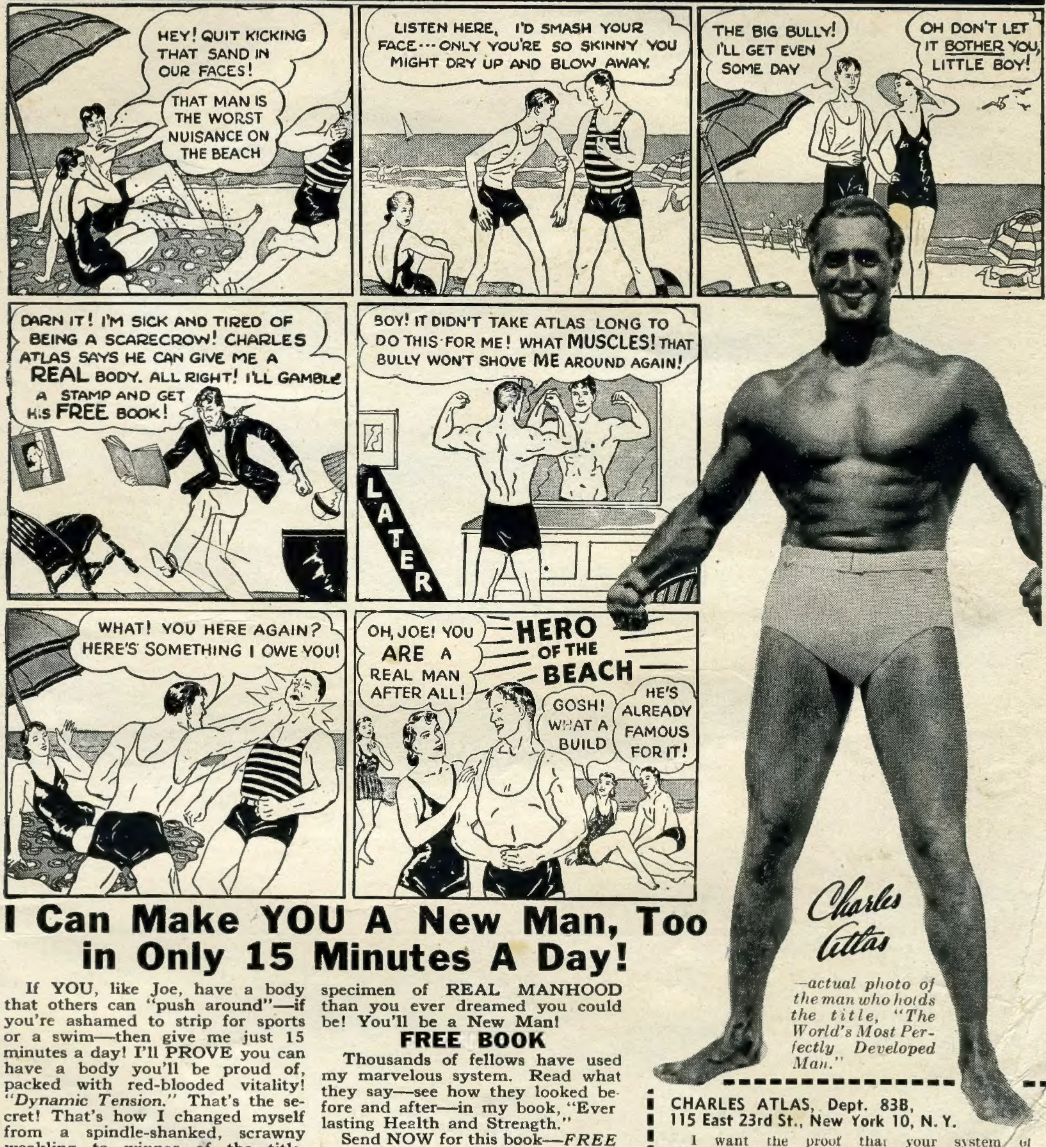
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THE BIG BULLY! I'LL GET EVEN SOME DAY
OH DON'T LET IT BOTHER YOU, LITTLE BOY!
DARN IT! I'M SICK AND TIRED OF BEING A SCARECROW! CHARLES ATLAS SAYS HE CAN GIVE ME A REAL BODY. ALL RIGHT! I'LL GAMBLE A STAMP AND GET HIS FREE BOOK!
BOY! IT DIDN'T TAKE ATLAS LONG TO DO THIS FOR ME! WHAT MUSCLES! THAT BULLY WON'T SHOVE ME AROUND AGAIN!
LATER
WHAT! YOU HERE AGAIN? HERE'S SOMETHING I OWE YOU!
OH, JOE! YOU ARE A REAL MAN AFTER ALL!
HERO OF THE BEACH
GOSH! WHAT A BUILD
HE'S ALREADY FAMOUS FOR IT!
Charles Atlas

—actual photo of the man who holds the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

I Can Make YOU A New Man, Too in Only 15 Minutes A Day!

If YOU, like Joe, have a body that others can "push around"—if you're ashamed to strip for sports or a swim—then give me just 15 minutes a day! I'll PROVE you can have a body you'll be proud of, packed with red-blooded vitality! *"Dynamic Tension."* That's the secret! That's how I changed myself from a spindle-shanked, scrawny weakling to winner of the title, "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

"Dynamic Tension" Does It!

Using *"Dynamic Tension"* only 15 minutes a day, in the privacy of your own room, you quickly begin to put on muscle, increase your chest measurements, broaden your back, fill out your arms and legs. Before you know it, this easy, NATURAL method will make you a finer specimen of REAL MANHOOD than you ever dreamed you could be! You'll be a New Man!

FREE BOOK

Thousands of fellows have used my marvelous system. Read what they say—see how they looked before and after—in my book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Send NOW for this book—*FREE* It tells all about *"Dynamic Tension,"* shows you actual photos of men I've turned from puny weaklings into Atlas Champions. It tells how I can do the same for YOU. Don't put it off! Address me personally: Charles Atlas, Dept. 83B, 115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N.Y.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83B,
115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of *"Dynamic Tension"* will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book *"Everlasting Health and Strength."*

Name...
(Please print or write plainly)

Address...

City.......................... State..............

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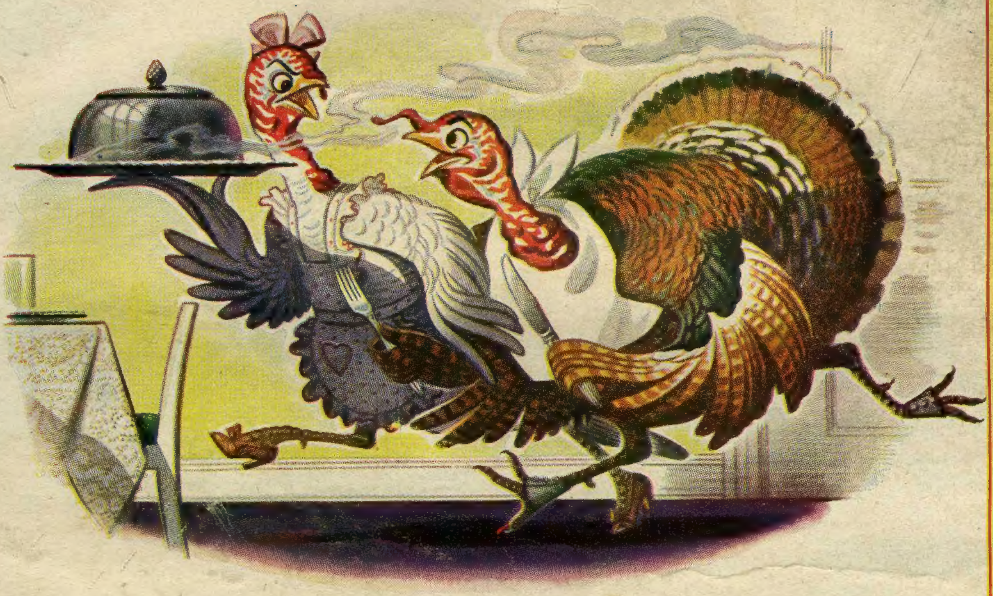
Think twice before you gobble !



Food is the mightiest weapon of all. This holiday season, buy and cook only what you need. Eat it all. Waste nothing. Share with those who need it most. Food Fights for Freedom.

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Clear heads choose Calvert"**

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